New Testament
Toaru Majutsu no Index 10

To save Magic God Othinus, Kamijou Touma has made an enemy of the entire world.

The influential leaders, Level 5s, magicians, and other previously reliable allies all attack him as powerful “enemies”.

This battle seemed to have the least chance of survival and least amount of hope of any in his life.

The world he returned to was the same as one scene from that “hell”.

But he does not give in. He is not alone this time.

To save Othinus from the entire world, her power of as a magic god must be neutralized.

To return her to a human, she must retrieve her eye from Mímir’s Spring in an old Danish castle.

Now, he has an objective.

Kamijou fights to protect the life and smile of a single girl.

か-12-48

新約 とある魔術の禁書目録（インデックス）⑩

鎌池和馬

電撃文庫

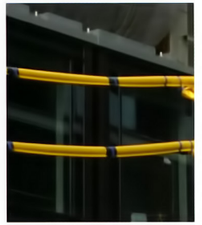
9784048665322

1920193006308

ISBN978-4-04-866532-2
C0193 ¥630E

ASCII MEDIA WORKS
ASCII Media Works
KADOKAWA Published by Kadokawa Corporation

Recommended Retail Price: 630 JPY
*Consumption levy will be added to the price separately



Kamachi Kazuma

Something may be under construction because the power cables have this yellow cover. It’s wonderful how merely changing the color makes it feel so different.

[Products of Dengeki Bunko]

Toaru Majutsu no Index 1~22
Toaru Majutsu no Index SS 1 & 2
New Testament Toaru Majutsu no Index 1~10
Heavy Object Series (8 Books Total)
The Zashiki Warashi of Intellectual Village 1~3
A Simple Survey
A Simple Monitoring
The Circumstances Leading to Waltraute’s Marriage

Illustrator: Haimura Kiyotaka

I am slowly drawing in the back country of Hiroshima.

新約

とある魔術の禁書目録 インデックス

鎌池和馬

イラスト／はいむらきよたか

10

“Mímir’s Spring”

According to Othinus, the lake surrounding Egeskov Castle south of Odense on the Danish island of Funen is Mímir’s Spring. The eye she gouged out and sacrificed is there. The ceremonial act of destruction that was gouging out her own eye created a system out of the sacrifice and she ascended from human to magic god. By returning the eye to her eye socket, her specialness as a magic god will vanish.

That is the sole method of returning Magic God Othinus to human.

"M-min-minus fifteen degrees!?"
Level 0 student of Academy City
Kamijou Touma
"Well, it is cold enough to break a thermometer."
Former Gremlin member and Magic God
Othinus

"This does not fit with Kamijou Touma's previous behavior. Does anyone have any ideas?"
Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church
Krans R. Tsarskiy
"This isn't good."
President of the United States of America and Commander-in-Chief of the US Military
Roberto Katze

"What?"
Boss girl of the Magic Cabal known as the Dawn-Colored Sunlight
Leivinia Birdway
"What is this?"
Level 5 of Academy City and Tokiwadai Middle School
Misaka Mikoto
"Are you upset that your precious big bro was taken from you?"
Member of the potential British Magic Cabal known as New Light
Lessar
"..."
Nun who has memorized 103,000 grimoires
Index

contents

10 Prologue A Certain Boy Becomes Humanity's Enemy Introduction_00.

192 Chapter 14 V.S. "The Police of the Front Stage" Round_06.

220 Chapter 15 V.S. "The Merciless Scientific Vanguard" Round_07.

238 Chapter 16 V.S. "The Heaven-Sent Child Loved by Electrons" Round_08.

104 Chapter 11 V.S. "The Nuns Wavering in God's Majesty" Round_03.

160 Chapter 13 V.S. "The Blacksmith who Releases the Magic Sword" Round_05.

138 Chapter 12 V.S. "The Four Demon-Slaying Swords" Round_04.

260 Chapter 17 V.S. "The Master of the Library and the Magic Queen" Round_09.

66 Chapter 10 V.S. "The Fury of Two Billion" Round_02.

28 Chapter 09 V.S. "The One who Bears White and Black Wings and Opposes the World" Round_01.

286 Chapter 18 V.S. "The One who Opposes the Magic God" Round_10.

308 Chapter 19 V.S. "The Hammer-Wielding Almighty God" Round_11.

348 Chapter 20 V.S. "???" Round_12(Secret).

370 Epilogue What does the Right Hand Grasp After the Fighting? Finale_∞.

TOARU MAJUTSU NO INDEX NEW TESTAMENT

新約

とある魔術の禁書目録

インデックス

10

KAMACHI KAZUMA
鎌池和馬
イラスト・はいむらきよたか
HAIMURA KIYOTAKA
デザイン・渡邊宏一（2725 Inc.）

WWW.BAKA-TSUKI.ORG

PROLOGUE

A Certain Boy Becomes Humanity's Enemy.

Introduction_00.

There was no need for any difficult thoughts.

That girl was heading towards death all alone.

She may have brought it all on herself, but a certain boy could not allow that conclusion to happen.

And so he fought back.

He had many reliable allies in the place he had so yearned to return to, but he clenched his fist once more in order to proudly return there properly, even if it meant turning his back on all of them for the time being.

♦

Now, fight.

Clench your right fist to protect the life and smile of a single girl.

♦

To be absolutely clear, Kamijou Touma was not going to unconditionally write off all of Othinus's crimes.

He simply could not allow this frenzy in the name of justice to kill her without passing proper judgment on her.

If a legitimate judgment was passed on her and she was shut in a dark cell for decades to come, it would have been none of his concern.

But even if that had happened, he would have never abandoned her.

He would have visited her countless times. No matter how much time it took and even if they had to wait until they were old and wrinkled, he would have made sure she was met with a smile when she finally was released from that cell. And once all of her crimes had been made up for, they could walk together in the light of the sun.

That was the true form of this fight.

He did not think the reason of the world was forceful enough to rob even that possibility from her.

No matter what it took, Kamijou Touma would "save" Magic God Othinus.

"So…"

That girl with long wavy blonde hair, white skin, and one eye covered in an eyepatch looked at Kamijou's resolute face and asked a question.

"I understand what you want to do. This is just more proof that you can't fix stupidity."

They were in the complex labyrinth inside the countless drifting ships making up Sargasso, but they could not stay there forever. But not because they would eventually be found. The odds were much higher that the entire landmass would soon be destroyed by missiles.

"So what exactly do you plan to do? We're currently surrounded by ocean, so how do you plan to safely and covertly escape?"

"……That's actually a really good question."

"Wait… Don't tell me you hadn't given this any thought at all."

Unpleasant sweat poured from Kamijou's body and he poured all his energy into averting his gaze. The girl known as a god heavily, silently, and unsteadily stood up.

"You make such a big show of rescuing me and then you do this!? And what did you hope to do if we did escape? Imagine Breaker won't work against cruise missiles that don't rely on the supernatural and I'm currently on the road to death thanks to that fairy spell. How!! In the hell!! Do you hope to rescue me!? Well!?"

"Wait, wait! Othi-chan, don't climb on top of me!! Do you have any idea how revealing that outfit is!?"

"Don't call me that!! Even if you understand me, that's getting too friendly, human!! And I don't like how it makes you sound like my uncle!!"

"I'm not trying to make fun of a god or anything. And if we're gonna bring up what things sound like, let's get into why I dropped the 'nus'. I think that would make most people think of the word 'anu-…"

“I’m gonna punch you! I really am gonna punch you!!”

Even with her spear gone and while suffering due to the transformation to a fairy, she was still a god. She could easily beat the snot out of the boy who stopped World War III with a single fist.

While gasping for breath (on top of Kamijou Touma’s stomach), Othinus finally realized this was no time for this.

“Let’s sum up the important points.”

“U-ubfh…”

“The first problem is of course the fact that the entire world is after me. No matter how we end this, there has to be some clear dividing line.”

Kamijou was as red as a tomato, so she shook his collar and kept his mind from travelling to Valhalla.

“And the second problem is the fairy spell that Ollerus hit me with. It is currently destroying my body from the inside, so we have to stop its advance in some way.”

“Is there a way of doing that?”

“Someone apparently said that god does not play dice, but I have to leave this up to chance. I can’t see the future,” she spat out. “But there is a hope for that second problem. The fairy spell was created to be used on a magic god, so it won’t work on a human.”

“Wait a sec.”

Kamijou frowned a bit as he thought over the information she had just presented to him.

“So if you go back to being human…”

“The internal destruction will stop. But it means sacrificing a lot of power.” She placed a hand over the eyepatch. “I rose to the position of magic god by gouging out my eye and offering it to a spring. It was a ceremonial act of destruction. You could call it a systematic sacrifice. The eye is still at the bottom of that cold spring and all that makes me special will vanish if I retrieve it and place it in the eye socket. I didn’t use this method even when I abandoned my power before. Thinking back, that was a sign of my lingering regret.”

“All right!!” shouted Kamijou.

Othinus let out a surprised voice.

This was simply because he had hugged her without thinking.

“That means we can save you!! It’s not just a dream!! We don’t have to create a goal out of thin air or anything. There was a goal prepared for us from the beginning! In that case…!!”

“H-honestly! Don’t get so friendly, human!!”

She pushed him away with her small hands, but his smile did not wane.

After all, he had just received the best news possible in that hopeless situation.

The hatred and desire for Othinus primarily came from her inhuman power. She had previously suggested that some would appear to raise her up once more if she were placed in a cell, but this would eliminate that danger.

Once he was finally torn from Othinus, he continued speaking.

“I had no idea. If I’d known about that weakness, we might have been able to resolve this more peacefully and skipped the tens of thousands or hundreds of millions of deaths.”

“Those deaths are not my responsibility. Plus, that was the single safety in case I lost control. I could not reveal it even to the others in Gremlin.”

She had now revealed it to Kamijou Touma.

That was surely due to the essence beginning to grow inside her. No matter how many disagreements or misunderstandings there were, that was not to be trampled on.

She felt as if she had found something she had to do.

“So our goal for now is retrieving that eye. Where is this spring?”

“Denmark. Mímir’s Spring lies deep in the land that refers to Odin as Othinus. My eye lies submerged in that spring of wisdom even now.”

This did not solve the first problem. It gave them no way of suppressing the world’s hatred and fear. But neutralizing her power would certainly help in getting them to disarm.

“Just to be clear, you don’t have to go with me.”

“Isn’t it a bit late for that? And be honest, god-chan. You’re breathing a sigh of relief inside, aren’t you?”

“Don’t push yourself too far. Have you forgotten you thought about killing yourself after you were inundated by the world’s malice and good will? That same tragedy is going to arrive now. And this time, you don’t need to experience it. And more importantly, *there is no fixing the world this time*. Fail once and you lose everything.”

“Perhaps, but I’m not facing it alone this time. The world looks different now.”

She clicked her tongue and looked away.

While still sitting on top of him, she asked a question.

“Then let’s bring this conversation full circle. How do you plan to escape Sargasso? We’re in the middle of the ocean and both magic and science have us surrounded in every way possible. Any ideas?”

“Help me, Othinus-chan.”

“So you’re all talk and your only option is praying to god?”

In her annoyance, Othinus most likely did not realize that it was actually quite rare for Kamijou to ask someone else for help like this.

Their “understanding” was not a one-way ticket.

“Listen. This is truly the last time you can do this. I’ll be using every last ounce of strength I have as a magic god, so don’t rely on me again. The internal destruction would smash me to pieces.”

As she spoke, Othinus pulled something from inside her witch’s hat.

It was a straight bone that looked perfect for a dog to hold in its mouth. It looked like some kind of animal’s leg and the side had strange writing carved into it with a blade.

“This is called the Bone Boat. Just like the crossbow, this magic item is used by Othinus but not Odin. I can freely change its size and it can cross all of the world’s oceans in an instant.”

“In an instant? Wait a minute. If it teleports you, I can’t go along. My right hand would negate it.”

“Then rethink your viewpoint,” she muttered while rubbing her fingers along the writing on the side. “It does not move the two of us. It moves everything except for us. *It rotates the whole planet around.*”

An instant later, the scenery grew distorted.

♦

Index, Misaka Mikoto, Leivinia Birdway, and Lessar searched their surroundings after being left on Sargasso.

And they reached a certain conclusion. There was no other conclusion they could reach.

“They vanished.”

Birdway sounded annoyed and Mikoto snapped back.

“Wait. What is going on!? That idiot made a complete 180 the instant he arrived here! I thought we were all in agreement about defeating these Gremlin people!”

“Hmm… It seems unlikely that he was *messed with* using brainwashing or suggestion, but she is a magic god. To be honest, we don’t have any idea what exactly she can or can’t do.”

“……”

The only one to remain silent was the girl in the white nun’s habit.

Index held 103,000 grimoires. She was a living treasure trove of wisdom that could supposedly reach the level of magic god if she used them all correctly.

From her position, she could predict *what a magic god was and what a magic god could do*.

Birdway scratched at her head in displeasure.

“Whatever the case, we need to find out where he disappeared to and tear him away from that magic god. He may be somewhat special, but he’d die instantly if the entire coalition army attacked and he could easily be caught in the middle and killed as the magic god destroys that army.”

“Hee hee hee. Are you upset that your precious big bro was taken from you?”

“What?”

While the two short girls (although there was a plain difference in the chest) butted heads, Mikoto’s cell phone rang.

“?”

She had received an email.

She casually opened it.

(Huh? But I thought the panic in Tokyo had cut off all communications?)

And then she was left dumbfounded.

“What is this?”

♦

A certain group was more deeply troubled than any other by Othinus and Kamijou Touma’s disappearance.

They were inside the UN Headquarters building in New York.

The group was made up of the leaders of the world’s most powerful nations and largest churches.

“This isn’t good,” groaned United States President Roberto Katze.

Below them was every piece of information gathered from soldiers on the scene, UAVs, and military satellites. In a way, they had more accurate and detailed information than Mikoto’s group who were actually on Sargasso.

The boy who was Patriarch of the Russian Orthodox Church politely raised his hand before speaking.

“This does not fit with Kamijou Touma’s previous behavior. Does anyone have any ideas?”

“He has had contact with Gremlin a few times before.” Roberto held his head in his hands. “Hawaii, Baggage City, and it’s unconfirmed, but something seems to have happened in Academy City. Magic God Othinus supposedly has absolute power, so why did she let him live at Baggage City? …There may have been some complicated reason for that.”

“The truth of that is not the issue,” cut in a sickly-looking woman.

She controlled France’s politics from deep underground and was known as the Femme Fatale.

Queen Regnant Elizard then spoke up in annoyance.

“Once those doubts begin, saying he’s innocent because we know him isn’t enough, hm? The only way to stop this worldwide frenzy is to attack and eliminate the source.”

“Isn’t that the same theory used during the witch hunt?”

“For us, *that never came to an end*. You can be as idealistic as you want, but if we don’t do this, human society will soon boil over with fear of Othinus.”

From the English revolution to World War III, the queen had seen Kamijou Touma’s power firsthand. No matter how it happened, having him as an enemy was a painful piece of information. The Royal Family, the Knights, and the Anglicans were made up of

magicians who belonged to an organization yet focused on the individual. If they were forced to go up against that boy, it was impossible to predict how they would react.

They had already begun contacting the leaders of the Russian Orthodox Church and the Roman Catholic Church. The leaders of those three major churches were likely releasing the restrictions on specially sealed spells. Elizard had her own thoughts while watching them prepare spells that could literally destroy a nation.

(It might be best to leave this to the "official" groups like the SAS and MI6. Extreme irregulars using supernatural power might actually give him a way out.)

Roberto let out another heavy sigh.

It may have come from his position as the leader of a nation or it may have come from his position as the protector of something even greater.

And then he spoke once more.

"In that case, we can only continue as normal. We find the 'Othinus faction' that has made their way through the world and we destroy them equally. That's the only way to prevent society from growing any more unstable."

♦

The email was sent out to all of them at once.

"What the hell is this? What is that piece of shit doing?"

Academy City's #1 clicked his tongue in displeasure.

"I can't believe it. This city is still doing this kind of thing?"

Academy City's #2 was confused.

"What is this?"

Academy City's #3 felt the hand holding her cell phone tremble.

"Denmark? What a pain. If they don't pay travel expenses, even if you killed them, you'd barely break even."

Academy City's #4 made the calculations in her head as usual.

"Oh? I don't know what happened, but it looks like I have more to do now☆"

Academy City's #5 gave a fearless smile that gave no hint of her true feelings.

"…"

Academy City's #6 toyed with the phone.

"What kind of email is this? It's got no guts at all. Did this come from some intellectual with no common sense?"

Academy City's #7 cracked his neck.

Those screens opened simultaneously in different locations displayed a short text:

Requesting the death of Magic God Othinus and Kamijou Touma who is traveling with her.

♦

While standing on the deck of a cruiser, Stiyl Magnus placed his cell phone to his ear.

The storm had calmed down.

The Russian bomber formation flying above and Jörmungandr of Gremlin had both disappeared.

"Kanzaki, what do you mean Kamijou Touma vanished along with the magic god?"

"I am checking the information as well, but it doesn't seem to be a joke. The Gremlin members who were sealing off the important transportation points around the world are also vanishing one by one. This must have been a surprise for them as well."

"I see."

He lit the cigarette in his mouth and looked up into the sky once more.

His opponent had not had a reason to flee. If it had continued, Stiyl was the one who would have been in danger.

"Then what do we do?" he asked.

"We work for an anti-magician peace preservation organization. We don't do anything until we receive official orders, but we should be summoned before long. And if that happens…"

"We'll be asked to go fight Kamijou Touma to the death."

The magic side, the science side, the official organizations, those who worked behind the scenes, and even Gremlin who acted in absolute secrecy would be pursuing those two.

They had truly made an enemy of the entire world.

This was six billion vs. two.

“What is he thinking? But if he’s betrayed her, I’m not opposed to killing him.”

♦

In an unknown place, the Will of the Misaka Network writhed about.

“Ah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!! /return.”

If she had possessed a physical body, she would have been laughing.

She would have been holding her sides and had tears in her eyes.

“As I started to disappear, I certainly didn’t expect this /return.”

She spoke with no one to listen.

“But /backspace, he wouldn’t be Kamijou-chan if he didn’t exceed my expectations /return.”

She was closer than anyone.

She was more distant than anyone.

She spoke slowly as if watching the back of a rock star who had broken out of a long slump and was stepping back up onto the stage once more.

“Welcome back, Kamijou-chan /return.”

♦

Meanwhile, Kamijou Touma and Othinus had arrived near the Arctic. The boy shivered in the white snowy scenery.

“B-b-b-b-b-b-b-bh-b-bh-bh!!”

“If you want to speak, use human language. Stop creating a language not even a god can understand. You’re destroying the laws of the world.”

“M-min-minus fifteen degrees!? What is this number my cell phone is showing!? Th-this isn’t accurate, right? Heh. Eh heh heh. The thermometer broke, right!?”

“Well, it is cold enough to break a thermometer.”

Othinus looked perfectly calm despite her outfit covering no more area than a bikini.

“But this is odd. On average, the climate here shouldn’t be enough for snow like this even during the winter. Well, I hear there’s been strange weather everywhere recently. I guess this kind of thing happens.”

“Bfhah!! I-I-I-I-I’d rather be in Russia than h-h-h-here!!”

“I doubt it. It gets to fifty below freezing in some parts of Russia.”

(Is she really dying?)

Kamijou could not resist any longer, so he spoke up while wrapping his own arms around his shoulders.

“Wh-why is my breath sparkling? Did we wander into a shoujo manga or something!?”

“That’s diamond dust. Want to take a picture?”

“I-I-I-I-I can’t take it. I need to buy a coat somewhere. D-don’t worry. I’m sure they trust the Japanese yen here!!”

“Do what you want, but don’t stand out too much. And do you even know what language they speak in Denmark?”

“I can manage overseas using body language! Beef or fish! Sightseeing!!”

Kamijou may have been hallucinating due to the cold because he started shouting nonsense and running through the white scenery. He spotted a man clearing snow from the roof of a pastoral brick house and he began trying to communicate with the gestures of a broken robot.

After a few minutes, he returned.

His drooping shoulders suggested he had not had much luck.

“What did he say?”

“He said acting out in your youth is fine, but this winter is too cold so we should stick to car sex if we want to let loose outdoors.”

“I-I’m going to destroy this world!!!!”

Kamijou Touma was forced to physically restrain the dying magic god.

He unexpectedly gained some warmth from her skin.

CHAPTER 9

V.S. "The One who Bears White and Black Wings and Opposes the World".

Round_01.

Part 1

Kamijou Touma and Othinus trudged through the white snow. There did seem to be an asphalt road, but it was under too much snow to see. The ground was just a white plain with conifer trees sticking up in places. There were occasional road signs, but they could see no houses or even telephone poles.

The boy spoke in annoyance as a bit of snow accumulated in his spiky-hair.

"Why is the population density in Europe so messed up? In the large cities, houses are crammed together like a kid's toy box, but it quickly turns to this once you leave those cities."

"Speaking from the world's standards, Japan is the strange one. You don't often find an island nation where you can never see the horizon."

Kamijou thought the horizon would be visible in Hokkaido, but he abandoned that line of thinking once he reached the image of warm ramen. While walking through this near-Arctic environment in his school uniform, he felt his heart would break if he thought any longer on that trinity made of salt, butter, and corn.

"Where are we anyway?"

"Hjørring… No, we're probably a bit further south than that. You can see it on the signs, right?"

"And where do we need to go?"

"The Kværndrup area. Specifically, Egeskov Castle which floats above a lake."

"……"

He could only give a stiff smile.

Fortunately, Othinus-chan quickly caught on.

“Don’t tell me…”

“I don’t know any of that! Why would I!? You can’t expect your average Japanese high schooler to draw a map of Denmark!!”

“Oh, dammit. Do I have to explain Denmark itself to you?” She used one hand to toy with her hair and gave an annoyed sigh. “Listen. Denmark is a country located north of Germany. It is made up of a large peninsula bordering Germany and nearly 450 islands. It may sound like the peninsula is the main part, but the capital city of Copenhagen is on one of the islands.”

“Right, right.”

“It is part of NATO and the EU, but they still use their own currency of the krone and øre instead of the Euro. It’s similar to the British pound. That shows you how they distance themselves from the surrounding nations, right?”

“Right, right.”

“Their official language is Danish, but they understand English. In the southern portions, German works too. It’s easy to think their main industry is sightseeing, but they actually focus more on manufacturing such as shipbuilding and the heavy industries. They are primarily protestant, but there’s a fair bit of Catholicism as well. They view Norse mythology as an important sightseeing resource, but almost no one actually believes in it. You can think of it as similar to Stonehenge.”

“Right, right.”

“By the way, I want to check one thing. I’m not trying to doubt you, but are you actually listening to me, you bastard?”

“Eh? Well…” Kamijou looked puzzled. “I was thinking that you must like explaining things, just like Index and Birdway. I switched over to simply taking it all in instead of interrupting.”

“What?”

“Oh, don’t worry about me. Keep going, keep going.”

“Did you think I was taking time to explain for my own benefit!?”

“Wait, Othinus!! Don’t put me in a headlock while dressed in that ‘new style of bikini’ that would shock even female wrestlers! It’ll do more damage to you in the en- vwah!!”

Even with a girl's soft underarm and arm pressing against his head, Kamijou Touma remained a gentleman.

But once the vise-like pressure arrived a few seconds later, he realized he had other worries.

"Abah!! Abababababhbababbhabhaba!?"

"We are in Hjørring which is near the northernmost end of the peninsula while Egeskov Castle is on a southern island. We can travel on land using the bridges, but it is still three or four hundred kilome- What is it? Why are you convulsing like that?"

Once Othinus finally released Kamijou Touma, he was completely limp, but the eyepatch girl ignored it.

"We've been walking south on your suggestion, but that is a difficult distance to cover for a human."

"I-if you're gonna conveniently teleport us around the planet, why didn't you bring us closer?"

"Don't be silly. How many tens of thousands of kilometers do you think that spell took us? This is a decent margin of error. Really, you should be praising my skill since we didn't crash into the Himalayas on the way and we weren't dumped into the middle of the ocean."

"Quick question: did the other members of Gremlin do everything they could to stop you from using that spell, by any chance? Did they insist on using boats and airplanes when traveling?"

"Shut up. We need to get back on topic. How do you plan to safely travel three or four hundred kilometers? The coalition forces will be laying out a search network as we speak."

"I actually have an idea concerning that." Kamijou was still lying on the snow. "Stealing a car or a bike would actually help them track us and they're sure to be watching the public transportation such as buses and trains, but hitchhiking is surprisingly useful. All focus is on the driver at checkpoints and they let their guard down when it comes to the passengers."

"Did you learn that during World War III? But this time we're both wanted worldwide."

"Will that really be so much of a problem? I'm one thing, but how many people know that 'Magic God Othinus' is a girl? Gremlin's rampage may have kept the existence of magic barely hidden, but for better or for worse, the magic side should view your existence as highly classified. If they let people know about you, more people might try to use you. I really can't imagine the Anglican Church or Roman Catholic Church handing out information on you left and right."

With that, their plan was to travel south by foot and try to hitchhike whenever they saw a car.

It was exactly like the ridiculous overseas plan of a young comedian.

Othinus had her doubts, but Kamijou Touma's face was devoid of worry thanks to his experience of travelling from England to Russia while only speaking Japanese like an old woman from Kansai. He was either quite accustomed to travel or very stupid.

However…

"There's nothing at all."

"No, there isn't."

"I haven't seen a single car for a while now."

"Th-this isn't good. My teeth are chattering from the cold. W-what country is A Dog of Flanders from? I feel like I'm experiencing the authentic version of that."

"Don't worry. That was set in Belgium."

"Phew."

"Denmark is the home of The Little Match Girl."

"Oh, god. That's fifty or even a hundred more steps into the realm of tragedy!!"

Illusions of salt, butter, and corn started appearing in the back of his mind again. Letting one's guard down while lighting a match could lead to having one's soul taken away. Someone who has been badly burned must not be given water to drink, and this was the opposite version of that.

Othinus's large witch's hat swayed as she tilted her head.

"If you're hungry, go search through that cave over there. As is the case in snowy countries, bears are always quite close by."

"This just keeps getting worse!! There's no way my death will be peaceful!!"

Even as they chatted, they did not let their guard down concerning their surroundings.

They were aware they were being pursued, but they did not expect the attack that arrived.

It began with a flash of white light directly overhead.

Part 2

A middle school girl named Amano Kaguya ignored gravity while floating curled up in the fetal position. Her anachronistic long black hair and junihitoe trailed out behind her.

No, that was not quite accurate.

Where she was, there was no gravity to ignore.

She was inside the Hikoboshi II, one of Academy City's three satellites. The giant structure was five kilometers long and Amano Kaguya was its master.

"Hi there."

Her casual words contrasted her lovely appearance.

She spoke as one people wanted to keep around but did not want anywhere nearby. The twenty meter spherical space had the formal title of "Zero Gravity Biological Impact Laboratory", but it could also be called a cell. Seeing it that way would hurt one's conscience, but that was not enough to change what the irresponsible adults would do.

"I had a feeling you'd be contacting me eventually, but this was sooner than I expected. Are you still acting like you're 'his' ally? Or are you in the role of the maiden who stops thinking about it altogether because she doesn't want to believe it?"

The girl's body lived up to her name. She was overflowing with inhuman beauty, but even if the men of the world would desire her, that did not mean the women of the world would envy her. Anyone who knew the hardships of dieting would feel a chill down their spine as soon as they saw her. And that held true even with the junihitoe almost entirely hiding the lines of her body.

"You want to know what I'm doing? Who do you think I am? We may have different affiliations, but I'm one of the 'abominable brains' that supports the board of directors, just like you. Of course, my range of influence is limited due to my director specializing in the aerospace industry. Ha ha ha. I know, I know. I was just teasing. Don't get so mad."

Any girl would think this girl had inimitable beauty, but they would also see something blatantly wrong with the position and balance of her face and body parts. Unless her skeleton and organs were cut down in size, that shoujo manga figure would not be possible.

"Yes, yes. Just as you've guessed, I'm aiming the S5 toward the earth. Sad, isn't it? The 'package' that just arrived by SSTO is loaded in the cargo space. Honestly, this is supposed to prepare a stupidly huge amount of sports drink into a beam, slam it into a desert planet, and create a giant cloud made of 'primordial soup'. The cargo space is meant to hold seeds of plants that can withstand extreme environments. It's supposed to be filled with the hopes and dreams of children, so why do you humans who crawl along the ground insist

on using it for things like this? And if Endymion were still functioning, we wouldn't have had to reconstruct this useless thing. Just because it's all according to that guy's plan doesn't make it hurt any less."

Her long stay in space (or rather, her maddening long confinement there) had given this modern-day Kaguya-Hime the ultimate beauty. In exchange, she could no longer eat or walk on two feet while in the 1G environment of the earth.

"And, well, this isn't the story of a Lv. 01 hero heading out to defeat the demon king, so there's no reason to start with the weakest and continue up from there. Instead, we decided to make this an impossible game where the final boss is dropped down from the very beginning. Yeah, yeah. A fifteen kilometer area will be wiped out, so the poor little hero with his wooden stick and cloth armor should be wiped out."

Something giant lurked truly silently beyond the thick window that could keep out cosmic rays and withstand debris.

That giant object was a ring with a diameter of over twenty meters and it was accompanied by several dozen more identical rings lined up vertically. They resembled a tunnel or the barrel of a cannon.

Amano Kaguya curled up once more, floated upside down in relation to the earth, and smiled thinly as she gazed out the window.

"It was Kihara Yuiitsu who insisted I use the S5, but I should probably keep that a secret from the 'package' loaded in the cargo space."

Part 3

Space Save Supply Shoot System – S5, entering input standby mode.

Mode "Attack" set.

Cargo shell size-C chosen. Commencing final non-destructive scan with electromagnetism and ultrasonic waves. Airtightness, cushioning, and heat-resistance all clear. See report for details.

Combustible gas, magnetism, and electromagnetic firing system synchronization complete.

Liquid shaft magnetism and conductivity confirmed. Commencing redesign of molecular bonds using vibration control.

Initial velocity upon leaving barrel set to 1500 km/h. Final velocity upon reaching the surface set to 31,000 km/h.

Securing ballistic trajectory. Solar wind, debris, geomagnetism, gravity, and centrifugal force all clear. See report for details.

Displaying message: “Commencing final check for erroneous input and illegal remote access. Please manually reenter target coordinates and weapon release code.”

All inputs received.

Number of errors: 0. S5, entering final firing mode.

Beginning countdown.

Firing liquid shaft and cargo shell.

Part 4

The bright flash of white light was first noticed by Othinus as she held her witch’s hat with one hand and looked up into the cold sky.

“Here it comes.”

For a moment, it did not feel real to Kamijou. His brain was filled with the unrealistic idea that there were two suns in the sky. It is often said that people only believe what they see with their own eyes, but that fact worked against Kamijou here. The overwhelming sight destroyed his rational thought.

It took several seconds for his thoughts to finally come into focus.

“Oh, crap.”

He instinctually grabbed Othinus’s hand and began running across the snow.

“Crap!!!!”

An instant later, “something” fell into the Danish countryside.

A crater 15 kilometers across was created around the impact point.

It was as if a sword had fallen from the heavens and split apart he earth.

Who would have realized it was nothing more than a giant mass of H2O, aka water.

The word “intense” did not do its speed and pressure justice. An overwhelming explosion of steam occurred directly above the impact point and a circular shockwave covered everything. This was no different from spraying a hose at a line of ants on the ground, but this was actually happening. A massive wall of dust gave the shockwave visual form and it knocked over the conifer trees at four or five times the speed of sound. The wall of liquid and steam had transformed into a ferocious wall of heat. The thick layer of snow melted in an instant and the exposed ground was heated to orange.

As all this happened, Kamijou Touma and Othinus dove into a cave that had been half buried in snow. It was the place she had earlier pointed out as a good spot for hunting bears.

The straight line attack from the heavens lasted for several seconds.

The shockwave swept across the surface, so they somehow survived within the cave.

But the heat assaulted that underground area. Despite the narrow cave entrance, the heat still made its way inside. The air dried in no time and stabbing pain raced through Kamijou’s eyes. He started to cry out in surprise, but Othinus covered his mouth with her palm so he would not breathe in the scorching air.

About half a minute later, the rumbling continued, but the two of them turned toward the cave exit. Kamijou hesitantly breathed in through his nose, but it did not burn his lungs. The temperature outside was negative fifteen degrees, so the heat had been cooled off quickly.

He headed for the cave exit with Othinus and looked outside.

The scenery had completely changed.

“What…is this?”

He did not find a silver world of thick snow or a brown world of exposed dirt.

He saw glass.

The surface of the fifteen kilometer crater was completely covered in translucent glass. Glass and porcelain were normally made of silicon, so it could be made by harshly heating sand or dirt. Even if it made sense from a rational standpoint, the scenery still looked like a completely different world.

He felt he had wandered into an uncivilized planet filled with silicon life forms from an old SF novel.

There may have been a good reason for that.

He had no way of knowing, but the S5 had not been created for military purposes. It was a giant terraforming device that would send a massive amount of water mixed with nutrients to the moon or Mars. That would produce clouds and blessed rain which would cover the desolate land with primordial soup. The distances to other astronomical bodies were massive, but the weightlessness of space removed the decay of speed. Water could transform between solid, liquid, and gaseous states, but that was due to the "behavior" of the molecular bonds. In special states such as flash boiling, water would forget the "behavior" that turned it into a gas when heated to 100 degrees and it would remain as a liquid. The water for the S5 used vibrations to artificially redesign the molecular bonds. Until it passed through the atmosphere and struck the surface, the water was made to forget the "behavior" that said it should be a gas.

Simply put, it was a powerful bomb using nothing but pure water.

Its military use by aiming it at the earth had been an excuse to get funding out of the higher ups who were unlikely to pay for a project that could only be used for developing other planets.

However, the boy was not looking at the glassy alternate world.

He was looking up because his mind was fixated on that which had caused the intense impact.

So much dust filled his vision that it felt like looking through a sandstorm. He felt as if the sun was suddenly producing much less light.

But he still saw what resembled a giant tree towering up toward the heavens. He had the unrealistic idea that he had wandered into the monochrome footage occasionally seen in documentaries. That was how far-removed this scene was from a high school boy's normal life.

The true identity of that mythical tree was a *mushroom cloud*.

He had not simply been thrown into the cloud of dust. He had been enveloped by that unique weather phenomenon that was still expanding.

"……"

He stared blankly at the scene before his eyes.

Turning the ground to glass was another well-known phenomenon associated with nuclear explosions.

As he stood there, someone tapped on his shoulder from behind.

"Don't worry."

It was Othinus.

“Mushroom clouds can be created by more than just nukes. Any explosion with enough force can do it. Large fuel-air bombs or thermobaric bombs should be able to pull it off, so…”

“No,” muttered Kamijou. “Only Academy City would be able to do this. And if they’re going this all-out, it’ll never end this easily! Mass-produced military clones, AIM thought entities, supersonic bombers, powered suits, cyborgs, and Rensa. I haven’t seen everything, but the glimpses I *have* seen are enough to know they’ll go farther than this if they’re serious!!”

The word “enemy” filled his mind.

Academy City had fired something from the sky or – more likely – from space.

But had they done so in order to directly crush him and Othinus? Had they made all those preparations for firepower that could be escaped on foot?

If not…

“Get back, Othinus.”

“What are-…”

“*This is only just beginning!!*”

His shout was immediately followed by a violent gust of wind that destroyed the mythical tree of a mushroom cloud in an instant. But this pressure did not come from outside. The giant tree was ripped apart from the inside, *from the blast site.*

Othinus narrowed her eye at the scene before her.

Academy City was a collection of all sorts of science and technology, and Kamijou recalled the primary example: esper development.

In that case, what was Academy City’s most powerful and reliable weapon?

The answer stood directly in front of them.

Academy City’s #1 Level 5, Accelerator.

That true monster who could control all vectors stood in the blast site.

Part 5

A mass of metal resembling of five meter rugby ball was buried at the center of the glass world. It had been fired at the tail end of the massive pillar of water and the huge steam explosion had cushioned its fall and allowed it to land without a parachute. Even so, it was unimaginable how much technology was needed to let it retain its shape and protect its contents with that much of an impact.

However, none of that entered Kamijou's thoughts.

His mind was ruled by an even greater threat.

"Of all people…" His lips subconsciously moved. "You're the very first one!?"

As he shouted, Kamijou raised his arm and knocked Othinus to her back on the translucent glass. A moment later, Accelerator calmly moved his slender leg.

He gently tapped his transport device as if preparing to juggle it like a soccer ball.

The mass of metal was the size of a light vehicle, but it flew forward with tremendous speed.

"…!!!???"

Kamijou Touma leaped to the side with all his might. The mass of metal almost grazed his clothing and it passed right over Othinus as it became a wrecking ball wielded by a giant.

"Hey!!"

"Stay on the ground! I'll handle him!!"

Kamijou fixed his posture as he shouted toward Othinus and then faced forward again. But it had been a mistake to take his eyes off that monster for even an instant.

The spot he had been in was deserted.

A blank filled Kamijou's mind just before a white face filled his vision.

The roar of four tornados whipping up the air from Accelerator's back reached Kamijou's ears after a short delay.

"God!!"

That deadly hand of reflection reached for his side in order to reverse his body's blood flow and electrical signals.

“Dammit!!”

He twisted his body while just barely managing to swipe away that demonic hand with his own right hand.

He went on to launch his fist upwards and right into Accelerator’s jaw.

A dull sensation passed through his fist and into his wrist.

“…”

Red eyeballs stared back at him without the slightest change in expression. A chill ran down Kamijou’s spine, so he leaped backwards without thinking.

A mass of air slammed into and split apart the ground where he had been.

A massive roar of shattering glass burst through the air.

(What’s going on? He’s quicker to recover than before and this isn’t shaking him. He can take a punch more than before!)

“Y’know…”

Finally, the white monster opened his mouth.

“What the hell are you even doing? Playing the hero with no thought to your own interests may be nothing new, but you’re showing a serious lack of vision this time.”

His voice contained no hint of urgency. He sounded like someone talking about a far off problem they had seen on the news.

However, the fury covering the world was like hell itself.

He lightly kicked the snow that was already beginning to accumulate on the glass and Kamijou crouched down as if twisting his upper body around. The white snow melted and the liquid split through the air at frightening speed. It looked a lot like a laser beam. When used in shipbuilding machine tools, simple H2O could slice through thick steel sheets like butter.

The bizarre sound cutting just barely above his head sent a chill down Kamijou’s spine and he attempted to approach while crouched down.

“What the hell are *you* doing!?” he shouted as he did so. “Sure, Gremlin did a lot of damage at Hawaii, Baggage City, and Tokyo, but you hold the position of the strongest! Did you really take enough damage to warrant killing people!?”

“I don’t have a reason like that.” Accelerator lightly clenched his fist. “When I was using my power, I didn’t have any crazy ideas about saving the world or protecting mankind, you dumbass!!”

A great roar split the air as fist struck fist.

“I’m only gonna bother looking after the people in my cell phone’s memory. But that person you have behind you might destroy everything in the world and kill off all of mankind. Among those six or seven billion are the few I know, so that’s a good enough reason for me to fight her. I won’t let you say otherwise.”

This may have been the opposite of Kamijou Touma’s path.

While saving the people close to him, Kamijou had gradually expanded his field of vision and eventually been shown problems on a global scale.

Accelerator had been able to reach that worldwide level from the very beginning and he had used that power to save someone nearby. All the while, the decisions he made contained enough destruction to bring down the entire world.

“I can’t go down the path you’re on,” said the monster as he stared Kamijou Touma in the eye at close range. And that former monster continued. “But that’s no reason for me to feel inferior to you.”

Wings burst from Accelerator’s back with tremendous force.

Rather than black, they were white.

As they pressed their fists together, the pure white wings stretched to several dozen meters and swung down toward Kamijou Touma like blades.

Kamijou leaped to the side as if sliding and somehow managed to intercept each wing as they fell from overhead, one after another. Rather than stopping them and destroying them, he touched their side and moved his hand to redirect them.

Accelerator spoke quietly while sending those fierce attacks.

“If I can either kill her or not kill her, then I ‘might as well’ kill her.”

His voice pierced Kamijou’s chest more sharply than the great din scraping at the planet.

The sharpness of his words may have been another reason the #1 was such a monster.

Even if he could guess at what went on in another monster’s head, he would not sympathize with them. The fact that he treated her as “identical” may have made him that much harsher on Othinus and her ability to destroy the world.

“If that’s the most surefire, absolute, and safe way of ensuring their safety, then I ‘might as well’ kill her. I’m not a fan of getting swept away by pointless emotion and getting stabbed in the back for my trouble. And I’m even less of a fan when it’s someone else’s back getting stabbed.”

Yes, thought Kamijou.

He was angry that Accelerator did not understand, but he did not resent the #1. And that was not simply because he had not explained the situation and had no time to do so.

That was a path Kamijou Touma himself had gone down.

Those had been his exact thoughts when the 23 special wards of Tokyo had transformed into a battlefield and he had been swept down the easy path while thinking he was a hero of justice. In fact, Accelerator used his violence while fully aware of what it truly meant to defeat an enemy, so one could say he was much, much wiser and more responsible.

“Hey, what’s the matter? I’ve said my bit and you’re still putting up a sad fight, so you’ve gotta have a reason for ruining what I’m trying to do here, don’t you!?”

“A reason, huh?”

Kamijou had difficulty holding off all of the white wings with just his one right hand. To intercept each and every one, he did the best he could to up his number of attacks.

“For most of everyone in the world, it’s probably true that Othinus is someone that’s not really worth saving. And logically, not saving her may be the better option, so you ‘might as well’ protect your own safety! But even so!!”

He used his fist to deflect one of the white wings to the side and simply shouted his reason forward.

“If you can choose between having her or not, it’s gotta be more fun to let her join the group!! It may not be logical and it may not be efficient, but this has got to be more enjoyable than throwing her out! That’s my reason!!”

The several dozen wings froze in place and Accelerator spoke in a quiet yet clearly irritated voice.

“You’re not even trying to convince me, are you?”

“That’s how true motives work.” Kamijou grinned. “If you had a reason that would convince anyone the moment you gave it, it’d be a manufactured argument you created for the sole purpose of convincing people.”

After traversing that nearly infinite hell, all Kamijou Touma had acquired was the elementary school level idea that "we should all just get along". That was simply how much experience was needed to go from "thinking he understood it" to "truly understanding it".

Kamijou was the same in his lack of a grand objective.

He wasn't talking about the fate of the world and that wasn't what he was fighting for.

"But," said the #1 as his countless wings creaked. "Aren't you being a bit too trusting in human nature to ask me to stop with nothing but that?"

"I don't expect you to," immediately replied Kamijou. "That's why we fight until we reach an understanding."

"…"

Accelerator fell silent for a moment, but took action.

Academy City's #1 flapped his white wings and rose to an altitude of 5000 meters in an instant.

Kamijou saw a pure-white light fly in a large arc and then start back toward the surface. He had no way of knowing, but this top-speed rush using the white wings had saved many people from the Star of Bethlehem at the end of World War III.

(My only chance is with a counter.)

Kamijou calmly moved his body.

(I can't hit him with anything but my right first, but he can take a punch better than before and I'll probably be torn to mincemeat if I don't finish it in a single hit.)

Before the clash, Kamijou crouched down and used his left hand to pick up a stone the size of a baby's head.

Accelerator's reflection prevented any attacks not made with his right hand. Throwing the rock would not even function as a distraction while that reflection was working.

But that was exactly why Kamijou did what he did.

In the instant of the clash between heaven and earth, Accelerator accurately attacked his target. He saw every action Kamijou Touma took while holding his right fist toward the heavens.

The monster did not even think about evading, but not because he was overly reliant on his reflection. He was well aware how unique that right hand was and he decided to rush in despite that hand which would pierce his absolute defense.

As long as he remained conscious and could continue his calculations, he would crush the boy before him.

He understood the power of that hand.

(...?)

Or so he thought.

Kamijou Touma took an odd action.

He first made a cross counter, just as Accelerator had expected. Aiming for the center of the chest rather than the face was certainly out of the ordinary, but it was within the range of options he could take with that fist.

The problem was what came later.

Kamijou swung up the baby head rock with his left hand.

He first neutralized the reflection with his right hand and then he applied a tremendous force to Accelerator's heart, even if it meant crushing his own right fist in the process. The impact from the rock was much greater than anything he could have caused with a mere fist.

(Ah.)

Accelerator's mind went blank.

With a tremendous noise, the thoughts that controlled his calculations cut out for an instant.

Part 6

"..."

Accelerator awoke buried in snow.

The ground of cracked glass was nowhere to be seen below the thin layer of snow covering everything. The earth was working to return the scenery to normal even after that strike from a terraforming device.

Kamijou Touma and the eyepatch girl were gone and a new figure had appeared in that silver world.

The girl had short brown hair and eyes devoid of emotion.

She wore a white coat and a cold-resistant hat with earmuffs. She was reminiscent of yet different from the person Accelerator had seen in Russia during World War III.

“What does a clone want?” he asked in annoyance.

“Hah hah hah /return. I was just so very, very worried about Kamijou-chan that I used my ticket and took control of this girl /return. I’m glad to see he could resolve his own problem, though /return.”

The giant grin looked out of place on that military clone’s face.

The one speaking was not the clone herself but the will of the network created by all of the clones.

While there was technically no division between the Will and the clone, anyone closely involved could understand the concept behind this difference.

“But /backspace, you weren’t going all out there, were you /escape? If their top batter of the #1 didn’t take action, there was a greater possibility of the other Level 5’s taking action randomly /return. And *if the #1 was defeated right away*, the higher ups would hesitate to use the rest of their precious seven for fear of losing them /return. Heh heh /return. Back when you knew nothing but winning and being the strongest, you would’ve never thought about gaining something by losing /return. I think you’ve grown some, Accelerator /return.”

The white monster clicked his tongue and gave a displeased reply while sitting on the snow.

“Is it really that surprising? You’re only here now thanks to my loss.”

“I’m saying it’s mature of you to be able to think about it like that /return.” The Will waved her index finger a bit. “I was really, really worried about Kamijou-chan, but he should be fine now /return. And since I’ve been using this ticket so much lately, I probably can’t come back out for a while /return. But /backspace, I did get to see something nice firsthand /return.”

“How long until the next time?”

“Don’t rely on me /return.” The Will chuckled. “This world belongs to all of you /return. As someone who floats around the Misaka Network with no physical body, I’m an outsider here /return. I may be able to give some outside advice, but I mustn’t be presumptuous enough to think about actually joining in /return.”

Some static mixed in with the girl’s voice, indicating that something was coming to an end and the time of parting was nigh.

“And as an outsider, I have one last piece of advice for you /return.”

“Do you ever shut up? Just get it over with.”

“The difference between you and Kamijou-chan is that one of you views us as an embodiment of good and the other truly views us as nothing but human /return. They may seem similar at first, but they’re completely different and it isn’t something you can consciously overcome /return. Maybe it’s like focusing too much on eliminating discrimination and instead trapping the person in the role of ‘victim’ /return. If you truly intend to face ‘us’, then you have to do something about that first☆ /return.”

With that said, the shorthaired girl fell forward into the snow.

Accelerator clicked his tongue in annoyance, but then realized something.

“Wait. What am I supposed to do with this unconscious girl?”

He received no response.

At the end of it all, some shackles had been prepared for that monster. Being played that perfectly ticked him off.

Part 7

The battle had ended, but the pain had not.

Kamijou Touma groaned as he walked across the greenery of the glass plain and trudged through the deep white snow.

“Gh…”

Two things tormented him.

The first was his shoulder. The intense force of the #1 falling from the heavens and onto his raised fist had almost dislocated the shoulder.

The second was his wrist. Smashing the large rock into his own hand had put a heavy burden on that fist.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

He let out a cry. It may have seemed meaningless, but it worked as a brief pain reliever. It was the same theory behind hammer throwers shouting to intentionally release certain substances in their brain.

They did not have time to stop and leisurely perform first aid.

He continued screaming at the top of his lungs to endure the pain. This was not over yet. Accelerator's arrival meant the coalition force most likely knew he and Othinus were in Denmark. Another pursuer could arrive or Accelerator could return and bare his fangs once more.

"Cool the injury with snow." Othinus scooped up some white snow in both hands. "Numbing the nerves is a dangerous method, but it can temporarily stop the pain without any special medicine. You need to make sure you don't give yourself frostbite, though."

While trapped in a whirlpool of pain, Kamijou initially accepted it without question.

But partway through, he realized something.

Unlike him, Othinus had no visibly obvious injuries and her hands did not tremble as they scooped up the snow.

But that was exactly what did not make sense.

When grabbing a hunk of snow without gloves, it was only natural to feel cold.

Her fingertips should have been trembling.

"Othinus?"

He faced the girl walking next to him, but she had not noticed the oddity herself.

Seeing her puzzled look, the doubt inside him grew to conviction.

"Othinus!! *When did you lose your sense of pain and cold!?*"

He ignored his own pain, grabbed her shoulders, and shouted in her ear, but she was the same as always. She did not even reflexively draw back in surprise, but he interpreted that as sluggishness rather than calm.

"Hm. That's a good question."

He felt he should have noticed sooner. She had casually walked through this near-arctic environment and performed a headlock with vise-like strength. He had simply assumed she retained some of her power as a magic god and was still far from being human, but what if that was not the case?

What if her senses were vanishing and her body's limiters were ceasing to function?

That too could explain her strange resistance to the cold and her tremendous strength for such a slender girl. Also, she had said from the beginning that using the Bone Boat was truly the last bit of her power. She had told him not to rely on her after that.

Not even the slightest piece of her special status as a magic god had remained.

“Dammit!!”

Kamijou did not know if he could do anything about it now, but he lent her his shoulder. She felt heavy and he could tell she could not fully support herself. Most of all, she was cold. She felt like a pillar of ice. An amateur high school boy could not determine how much her bodily functions were being restricted.

“I’m fine,” she said. “I can walk on my own, so you don’t have to do that.”

“You idiot! Forcing yourself to move might be destroying you inside!!”

What scared him most of all was how Othinus herself felt no danger. She was so far gone that she could not even do that.

It reminded him of a soldier with a fatal bullet wound to the gut who smiled as he forgot his pain in the very, very end.

“Staying here won’t help, so let’s get to Egeskov Castle and end this, Othinus.”

As the road continued on and on, the white landscape seemed to reject any and all life.

Nevertheless, Kamijou Touma stared forward and continued on.

“No matter who’s waiting for us up ahead, I *will* save you. I swear it.”

CHAPTER 10

V.S. "The Fury of Two Billion".

Round_02.

Part 1

They were far from human civilization.

Kamijou did not know if Othinus had frostbite, hypothermia, or whatever else, but he had to take her somewhere warm as soon as possible. Unfortunately, he did not know how he could do that. There had been almost no traffic on the road in the first place and the previous commotion would only keep vehicles away. The two of them would be buried in snow before they made it anywhere.

Or so he thought.

The situation completely betrayed his expectations.

"They say it's a meteorite! That's so cool! Too bad I didn't manage to record it with my smartphone! I could've been the hero of a video site right about now!!"

The amount of traffic increased considerably. More and more people drove up to see (what they mistakenly thought was) the unexpected astronomical show. They were all quite carefree because it had fallen in the middle of nowhere rather than in a city. After walking for about ten minutes, Kamijou and Othinus started seeing stands selling roast pork or salmon salad sandwiches.

He fully expected them to be selling fragments of the glass ground as souvenirs.

(Hmm. I hope Accelerator is okay lying around at the blast site.)

Kamijou and Othinus carried out their hitchhiking plan and received the help of an RV remodeled into a food cart. Othinus acted as a translator and it seemed the food cart had sold out of roast mutton and was on its way back home to gather more ingredients.

Kamijou parted with some of his precious few yen to buy some vegetable scrap and lamb bone stew. It seemed to be the food supplied for the workers. He had a feeling the price they charged him was exorbitant, but he was still glad to be able to warm themselves up.

“Hey, Othinus. Where are we headed?”

“Aalborg.”

“……”

“F-fine. I apologize for the overly short answer, so don’t give me that teary look, human! We’re travelling thirty or forty kilometers south from that plain near Hjørring. We’re headed in the right direction and we aren’t going too far out of our way by hitchhiking.”

The representative transportation methods for a high school boy like Kamijou Touma were walking and bicycling, so forty kilometers felt like a long distance. However, that distance could be cleared in twenty or thirty minutes in a car on the highway. That realization gave him a small desire for a license.

Othinus’s complexion was looking better than before and she could move her limbs normally. It was likely due to both the warm soup and the vehicle protecting her from the outside air. However, her senses were still numbed over, so he had no choice but to continue keeping watch over her.

Once the RV food cart arrived at a large city, Kamijou bowed to the workers and left. Othinus stood tall in a grand pose like always, so he could not use her to judge what proper behavior was.

Ten seconds after leaving, the cold began eating away at their body temperature.

“Brrrrrrrrrrrrrr. W-we need to buy coats. All our skin will turn purple if we don’t.”

“I’ve heard enough about that. How weak are you?”

“You’re only saying that cause your senses are numbed over! That triumphant look isn’t very convincing when your lips are turning blue!!”

Overall, the city was colored the hue of brick. Several factory smokestacks rose from the waterfront, but everything from the apartments to the fire station were made of stone. The population was packed together in this one area like a collection of variously-shaped building blocks, but there were few buildings taller than seven stories.

“Why is all of Europe like this? How do you handle the security deposit or key money with three or even five hundred year old apartments? Do they not care about fire laws?”

“They just have a large deposit. And if you look at the entire world, Japan is the odd one out. You won’t find another country with nothing but 2x4s and reinforced concrete.”

“By the way, I was sure something would happen when we passed through that undersea tunnel. I was prepared to have to race a giant wave of water out after the tunnel was blown up.”

“They think they have to fight a magic god at 100% power, so they don’t think submerging me under the ocean will kill me.”

Kamijou and Othinus’s overall goal was to find someone else to hitchhike with or walk to the next city, but they needed proper clothing first. Before that, they had to exchange Kamijou’s Japanese yen for Danish krone. If they continued with those RPG errand quests for too long, they would become a real-life Little Match Girl, so they hurried along.

“I-I don’t see anyone on this street and all the shops are closed.”

“It’s still early in the day.”

“Where is this anyway?”

“Virgin Anne's Street. It was originally developed as a large-scale prostitution district.”

“……”(←Really, really not sure how to react.)

“Did not hear me say ‘originally’? It’s just filled with bars now. And do you really have time to be getting your hopes up?”

“That bitter look came from hearing a beautiful girl bring up a topic like prostitution!! Come to think of it, was all this even necessary? Why are you explaining things and then getting mad about it!?”

They exited that bar district and entered a normal shopping district. Unlike Japan, all of the buildings were centuries old and made of stone or brick, but that was not what caught Kamijou’s attention most of all.

“What’s with the statue of a muscular macho man? Does sliding it aside reveal a stairway below it?”

“That’s a statue of Odin, aka me. You can find these statues all over Scandinavia.”

Below the chilly sky, Kamijou looked back and forth between the lovely girl and the macho statue.

“Well, there goes the beautiful girl image… Hey, just how much were people afraid of you?”

“Sh-shut up! That’s how I was treated in one of the worlds in the opposing mirrors!! The information about me is not always accurate, but it’s still a record left by a third party. And those records ended up remaining while I was continually remaking the world.”

“But why is the statue wearing nothing but pants and a cape? Then again, with you…”

“If you say ‘I could see it happening’, I’ll punch you. Keep that in mind.”

They exchanged currencies at an ATM-like device on the road. It was surreal seeing the machine directly embedded in the five hundred year old building.

The strange bills filling Kamijou’s wallet looked like toys to him, so he did not feel like he had any actual money.

“A-anyway, we need to buy coats. Please don’t tell me there are only made-to-order tailors around here.”

“What kind of place do you think Denmark is?”

“Let’s just say I wouldn’t be surprised to come across items named ‘herb’ or ‘potion’ around here.”

All of the stores were small, had no show windows, and were in centuries old buildings. Kamijou was more afraid to enter them than to head to a ramen shop run by a stubborn old man for the first time. He feared finding a high-class world where a single handkerchief would set him back 10,000 yen, but Othinus quickly found the best store and entered.

“It looks like a cheap one will only cost about 2500 krone. How much do you have?”

“Sensei, I don’t understand krone.”

“2500 would be about 50,000 yen.”

“How in the hell is that cheap!? Does that coat have a CPU inside!?”

“C’mon…”

“Don’t you dare bring up my ability to support myself. I’m a high school boy who was launched overseas with almost nothing but the shirt on his back!!”

“This cheap piece of junk can’t repel water at all. We’ll need to buy an umbrella as well.”

“Y’know what?”

The normal boy named Kamijou Touma took a step back and held up his thumbs and forefingers in L-shapes to create an imaginary frame.

“I think we might need to start as far back as getting you some underwear.”

“Oh, I get it. You’re insisting on mocking me at every turn, aren’t you? How about we take this outside?”

Part 2

Approximately half an hour earlier, preparations were underway.

Around the world, Denmark was well-known for sightseeing and manufacturing, but in Northern Europe it was known for dairy such as cheese. In fact, seventy percent of its territory was farmland.

Most large agricultural areas were never lacking in topics of discussion such as crop circles, but the situation was a bit different in the Aarhus area near the center of the peninsula.

Several military vehicles were parked there and air force soldiers were guarding them. The flat, snow-covered farmland had been levelled by tractors to clear a two or three kilometer stretch. It looked like a giant piece of duct tape had been attached to the ground and ripped up.

The biggest oddities were the several large aircraft politely stopped on the side of that straight line. They were the United States’ representative bomber. While a little less well-known than the V-shaped flying wings, they had a certain level of stealth ability, could travel at Mach 1.3, and could carry strategic nuclear weapons.

However, these did not carry any dangerous NBC weapons.

But in a way, they had transported something even more dangerous to Denmark.

“Yes, yes. We can’t go to Aalborg air force base as planned. Because of that supposed meteorite!! They’re keeping absolutely everyone out of the airspace there! Please send an official complaint to Academy City! I mean it!! They’re getting in the way!!”

Nuns in black habits disembarked from the bombers.

The brown-haired nun in the lead was Sister Agnese Sanctis and she was speaking into a cell phone.

“We had to make an emergency landing at a field airport near Aarhus. Yes, these ‘ruins’ were quickly prepared during World War III and we just had them repaired once more. It wasn’t fun. The paving is all cracked, so the landing was really bumpy. …But anyway!! I can’t believe you would cram people inside a place as unlivable as a bomb bay! Eh? It’s a lot faster than a transport plane? I don’t care!!”

Agnese and the other nuns sent by the Roman Catholic Church exited into the silver world, but those few hundred were not the only ones there. A quick glance around showed the faces of elites from the Anglican Church and Russian Orthodox Church as well.

This was not their destination.

They were preparing to use cars, trains, domestic flights, helicopters, and other means of transportation to arrive at different destinations and find Magic God Othinus and Kamijou Touma.

Despite being in the same place, they were all focused on different places.

They were sharing information to a certain extent, but they all had different interpretations of that information.

“Is this really all of the information?”

“They aren’t giving us false information to take the credit for themselves, are they?”

“If we give away their position, won’t the targets avoid them and come straight to us?”

“If we attack right after the target fights through them, wouldn’t we have a much better chance of defeating them?”

“No one’s going to attack us and make it look like the magic god’s doing, are they?”

Agnese concluded that the biggest reason for all the suspicion was the power of their opponent. It was an improper example for a nun, but she felt it was similar to a high-stakes game at a casino. They were betting the fate of the world or the right to steal and analyze the power of a magic god which could influence the fate of the world. The level of pressure was much greater than a child’s game of poker.

“We will be following our information and heading to Aalborg. Ask the pope to make the preparations on his end. The other forces will most likely lay in watch on the alternate routes and watch what we do. We have the greatest numbers, so they’re probably viewing us as bait or something to scare them out of hiding. But if we get a bite, they might come rushing in.”

While speaking, Agnese gestured instructions to her subordinates.

They had no one-man powerhouses like a Saint or God’s Right Seat, but they did have the strength of two billion believers worldwide.

They held the great mental strength of 1/3 of humanity.

Part 3

A loud, staticky noise filled Aalborg.

It came from the disaster prevention speakers set up around the city.

“What?”

“B-bbbh…”

While lightly beating her partner outside the tailor, Othinus stopped her hands and looked up. Incidentally, having the lovely maiden sitting on top of him had sent Kamijou straight into swine mode.

“This is a warning for Kamijou Touma or Magic God Othinus. We already know you are hiding in this city. Please disarm yourselves and surrender at Ansgar Church within ten minutes.”

The confused looks on their faces did not come from the dangerous content of the warning.

The warning was given in *Japanese*.

“No matter the reason, if you do not comply with the aforementioned demands, we will view you as hostile and begin an attack. Also, do not attempt to use civilians or historic relics as a shield. Such an act would be meaningless before our spell. To repeat…”

The voice filled every corner of the city, but it was unlikely many of the people looking up understood what it meant. Some younger people assumed it was some form of event and began whistling.

While lying on his back, Kamijou lightly shook Othinus who sat on his stomach.

“What do you think?”

“I don’t understand why they would bother warning us, but they must be confident to not try for a surprise attack. They must be prepared to kill a magic god at 100% power.” Othinus let out a short, white breath. “We’ve already seen the fairy spell as an example. They would have to be insane to attempt a straight fight, but they may have some weakness they can exploit.”

“…”

Kamijou fell silent because something seemed odd to him, but he decided it was not important at the moment. Once Othinus got off of him, he stood up on the snow.

“What should we do now?” asked the eyepatch girl. “Kick their asses?”

“When we don’t know who’s here or how many? They said ten minutes, so that means they won’t attack until then. Whether we’re gonna run, hide, or fight, we need to gather some information. For one thing, do they really know where we’re hiding? They might be playing this warning in every major city in Denmark to get us to react.”

“I wouldn’t be so sure they’ll wait the full ten minutes.”

The shopping district road was pedestrian only, so Kamijou jogged along it and peeked out on a larger road.

“Shit!”

He immediately pulled his head back and pressed his back to the wall.

Othinus looked doubtfully at the Asian pretending to be a spy.

“What is it?”

“Don’t go around that corner. You’ll stand out like a sore thumb dressed like that.”

A few nuns in black habits were wandering around near a bus stop on that larger road. Kamijou recognized the habits; they were the same ones worn by Orsola Aquinas and Agnese Sanctis.

“It’s the Roman Catholic Church. First the strongest esper and now violence with numbers. Othinus, we can’t fight through this one. If we head out without thinking, they’ll push back and crush us. We need to think up a way out of this city.”

“I may not be one to talk now that I’ve lost my power, but aren’t they just a mob of weaklings? Wouldn’t it be more realistic to defeat a few of them and continue on our way?”

“We can only rely on my right hand here. It’s useful against great firepower from a single direction, but there’s nothing I can do about repeated attacks from every direction at once. In a way, this is a worse opponent for me than that monster from earlier.”

“Ahh! Dammit! Why didn’t I think of that!?”

“Othinus-chan? Why do you look so regretful?”

At any rate, they decided to fall back and try to escape Aalborg on a different route. On the way, they spotted several more nuns with the exact same habit design. Some noticed them and some kept an eye on them while pretending not to notice. It was possible every single one of them had noticed the pair.

“From the flow of people and cars, it doesn’t look like the roads have been blocked off. If it comes down to it, we might be able to jump onto the back of a truck to quickly leave the city. Othinus, are you confident in your athletic ability?”

“Who do you think you’re talking to? I’m a god of war.”

“Just to be clear, this is without the support of the spells you can’t use any more.”

“…”

Magic God Othinus fell silent!!

Kamijou brought a hand to his forehead. It was possible he would have to push on Othinus’s petite butt to help her into the back of the truck.

However, it turned out the two of them had made two small mistakes.

First, they had not been accurately counting down the ten minute time limit.

A flash of light suddenly burst from a nearby wall. It was some kind of spell that resembled a laser beam. The instant Kamijou realized that, he twisted his body around and held up his right hand.

Second, they had grown conceited. They were not up against a Saint or Magic God. They had Imagine Breaker at their disposal, so Kamijou had assumed he could deflect any attack spell as long he was not surrounded and over-saturated with attacks.

That had been a fundamental mistake.

The instant he received the attack, his right arm was knocked backwards.

The intense impact twisted the joint of his right shoulder and sent his entire body spinning at least twice through the air.

Part 4

(Ah…)

At first, Kamijou Touma could not feel the pain properly.

His vision spun dizzyingly around and the idea that his right hand would work was destroyed. Confusion filled his head and he could not process even the most basic of sensations.

The intense pain finally exploded out once he crashed into the snow.

“Gah!? Aaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!???”

“Shit!”

Othinus was right next to him, but she sounded so very far away. She grabbed his unharmed left arm and half-dragged him to another alley.

A few similar beams shot out along the road and several footsteps followed. The nuns seemed to have lost track of them, but that would not last forever.

More importantly, Kamijou could not think about a long-term plan with his right arm almost destroyed. He clenched his teeth and put up with the pain.

“I’ll be touching it.”

With that warning, Othinus lightly traced her fingertips along his right shoulder. He was assaulted by a feeling of intense heat rather than pain. He felt as if the entire shoulder had grown two sizes larger.

“It isn’t broken. It’s only dislocated. This will hurt a bit, but an external impact can get the joint back in place.”

Othinus grabbed an edge of her cape.

“Bite this. It’ll keep you from biting your tongue in pain.”

“…? What is this?”

“What’s the matter?”

“Well, this is really…sweet and salty? Wait a second. Is this your sweat?”

“Hnn!!”

After some unthinkably painful noises, Kamijou could move his right arm once more.

There was no medical basis for it, but he felt as if he were going to cough up a clump of blood.

“Anyway, what was that?”

He tried rotating his shoulder and heard some dull cracking noises inside his body.

“Was it not magic? My right hand couldn’t negate it.”

“That was definitely based in human magic power. The beam pierced through the walls yet didn’t destroy the walls. It passed right through them. It’s clearly meant to target us while inside the city. My guess is it’s a spell that takes an offensive interpretation of stories

about lightning and divine punishment. And its structure is simple enough for anyone with a bit of Christian knowledge to put together."

The beam of light would pass through buildings and passersby while accurately roasting only its target.

With a spell like that, they could fight all out even in the middle of a city.

"But that doesn't make sense. My right hand didn't work."

"Have you never seen exceptions before? You should understand your right hand better than anyone."

He realized there were indeed spells that Imagine Breaker could not negate in time, such as Stiyl Magnus's Innocentius and Fiamma of the Right's Third Arm.

"So is the spell itself simple, but the power is…no, the numbers are too great?"

"If so, this might be a dangerous situation. We're up against the Roman Catholic Church, the largest denomination in the world. If the pope released their 'lock', they can do whatever they want."

It should have been obvious something out of the ordinary would be coming.

They did not care about Kamijou, so they had been preparing to fight a magic god who could destroy the world. They would use whatever means necessary to raise their odds of success by 10% or even 1%.

"You should assume that all two billion of them are consciously or subconsciously your *indirect* enemy here. Worst case, they might be using a standard spell two billion times at once here."

Part 5

They considered the layout of Aalborg.

The enemy was the Roman Catholic Church. That enemy's primary weapon was a spell cannon with two billion times the output thanks to gathering the magic power and processing power of two billion people across the world. The nuns scattered through the city acted as the eyes and ears of the cannon. If they caught sight of Kamijou or Othinus, the immensely powerful projectile would attack in a straight line while ignoring all buildings and passersby in the way.

The ability to pass through obstacles meant they could not use anything as a shield. If they were found, it was all over. Kamijou's right hand could not completely negate it, so his arm would either be dislocated again or broken. Needless to say, Othinus would fare even worse now that she had lost her powers.

"We need to do something about that cannon," said Kamijou with all that in mind. "Eliminating a few of their eyes and ears won't do any good."

"Yes, that seems to be the only option. We don't know how accurate it is or what its range is, so we can't be sure leaving Aalborg will bring us to safety."

Othinus began by agreeing.

"But where is this cannon? And we don't know how many eyes and ears there are in Aalborg. There could be hundreds, thousands, or even tens of thousands. Slipping past all of them won't be easy. If we try searching through every corner of the city, we'll be shot a million times over."

Othinus drew a crude map of the city in the snow and Kamijou pointed at one spot after looking across it.

"It's probably here."

"Why?"

"Let me ask you this, Othinus. If it was you, where would you put the cannon? In a safe place surrounded by thick walls? Or would you hide it in the middle of the closely-packed population?"

Othinus thought for a moment.

She had not simply relied on her power as a magic god. Until the lance had been completed, she had plotted against the entire world.

"Somewhere with a good view. Whether on its own or with help, that cannon uses visual targeting, so the best spot would be somewhere with no obstacles such as a desert or plain. That way any approaching enemy could be shot before they arrived."

"In that case…" Kamijou tapped on the snow. "There's a giant hole in the cityscape to the southwest where the churches and art museums are. There must be a park or something here. This is where I would put it."

"And it has a convenient 100 meter tower named Aalborg Tower. Make fun of the name if you want, but their cannon gets a view of the whole city from there."

With that, their plan was set and Kamijou gave a suggestion.

“I’ll go. Othinus, you hide somewhere.”

“Do you want me to punch you?”

“At least let me explain the decision first!!”

Fearing a crushed skull, Kamijou quickly explained with plenty of gestures. He told her what had seemed odd about the announcement given to the entire city earlier.

“I see. So you aren’t just trying to show off.”

“What kind of person do you think I am?”

“Just how much of your showing off do you think I’ve had to put up with?”

Othinus brought a hand to her chin and thought for a while.

“But if you’re going to destroy the cannon, you need a way to get close. If you just ran up, you’d be shot.”

“Uuh…”

“Don’t worry. I know what kind of person you are, so you don’t have to worry about disappointing me. I’ve already decided to punch you a few times once this is over.”

It seemed his only paths to happiness were to convince her to not punch him or to accept it as a reward.

“B-by the way, do you have any good ideas, oh great goddess?”

“That title is a good start, so I suppose I’ll give you the answer you want.”

Part 6

In a straight line, Aalborg Tower was less than two kilometers away, but Kamijou would be pierced by magical lasers a million times over if he tried to head straight there.

He had received a secret strategy from Othinus, but he could not unconditionally make use of it. He avoided standing out by running and instead walked through the streets while mixed in with the crowds.

(When you think about it, there were a few odd points to that announcement.)

Thinking about this was the same as admitting he was decisively cornered.

And admitting he was at a disadvantage did not give him a comeback plan.

(The warning was in Japanese and it addressed “Kamijou Touma or Magic God Othinus”. That means it was primarily addressing me rather than Othinus.)

As he stepped through the snow, he lost himself in thought.

(And were those beams really a spell meant to use on a magic god? The Roman Catholics may not know just how much of a threat a magic god is, but isn’t that spell more of an Imagine Breaker countermeasure?)

Needless to say, the threat to the world was Othinus, not Kamijou. He could not complain about how they treated him now that he was travelling with her, but the “enemy” should not have been focusing on him all that much.

Nevertheless, this group of two billion was prioritizing his elimination. He could only think of one reason why.

(Their original plan was to attack Tokyo Bay and utterly defeat Gremlin and Othinus. Why would they be giving us a chance to surrender now? The situation should be even more urgent than before, so why does this feel like the exact opposite?)

In other words…

(They’re trying to take me out of the fight early.)

In other words…

(They don’t know if I’m truly an enemy, so they’re taking me away from Othinus and then attacking that true threat with unwatchable destruction.)

In other words…

(They’re giving me a chance. If Othinus is with me, they’ll have no choice but to mercilessly attack, but they can put that off if I’m acting separately from her. Why would they be this kind? Am I up against someone I know?)

Once he came to that conclusion, he entered a main road.

His gaze met that of a nun in a black habit. She pointed at him and gave some sort of instruction.

A moment later, a tremendous flash of light burst out.

He did not feel any kindness in this at all.

He instinctually started to rely on his right hand, but he instead crouched down as quickly as he could. As the beam of light shot by overhead, it passed through the passersby and cars, but it did not harm any of them. They seemed to think it was some kind of light show similar to projection mapping.

Kamijou began running with all his strength.

“I was naïve!! That wasn’t what they were doing!! They’re definitely trying to kill me!!”

The nuns must have been contacting each other because more and more of them began appearing from different alleyways. All of those “eyes and ears” corrected the aim of the cannon spell. Kamijou felt a chill run down his spine, but he had no choice but to evade while moving forward.

Due to his pain and confusion earlier, he had not been able to carefully observe the attack, but he was able estimate the general direction the attack came from this time. Just as he had predicted, it came from Aalborg Tower. His only option was to focus all his attention in that direction.

But that idea proved a mistake.

Another beam burst out at close range from the side.

(What!? That’s a completely different direction!!)

He was caught entirely off guard.

He could not evade in time, so he raised his right arm and received a tremendous impact. Just as before, pain exploded in his right shoulder and he was sent spinning through the air.

“Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?”

He continued running with his right arm dangling limply down at his side.

Intermittent beams of light attacked from countless directions.

(I misread it.)

His consciousness wavered and not just because of the pain.

(It wasn't multiple eyes and ears supporting a single cannon. Do all of the nuns function as both the eyes and ears *and* the cannon!?)

He could no longer use his right hand now that the shoulder was dislocated.

He had completely lost and the beams of light pursued him from behind.

A moment later, the boy's body vanished from the streets of Aalborg.

Part 7

In the group of other nuns, Sister Lucia and Sister Angelene cried out as they saw the boy suddenly disappear.

"Too far! That's going too far!! Stop firing the Fish of the Supper! We were supposed to safely take him out of the fight! Who's the one who killed him!?"

However, complaining would accomplish nothing after the fact.

The nuns gathered around the point of his disappearance and then noticed something.

"S-Sister Lucia, what is this?" asked the girl with a bent back.

They were all focused on an opening in the stone-paved road. The square hole was about sixty centimeters across.

♦

Ansgar Church was located in the same green belt as Aalborg Tower and the modern art museum. Inside it, Agnese Sanctis was groaning at the report she had just received.

"A secret underground passageway!? What are you talking about!?"

"Just from looking in from the entrance, it seems to be dug by hand. At the very least, I doubt it's from the past 100 years. We are requesting documents from the city hall, but we have received nothing yet."

"What do you think it is, Sister Lucia?"

"Aalborg has had the misfortune of being destroyed by war a few times in Danish history. If this was secretly dug by the residents at the time to protect their property and lives, they might stretch around the entire city like a spider web."

“Then contact the gas company, the water department, and the subway contractors. Ask for any records of construction stopped because they ran into some old ruins.”

“We are already doing so, but will we make it in time?”

“Stop asking questions that only god knows the answer to. Nuns are forbidden to test the Lord.”

Agnese ended the communication, leaned back in her chair, and stared at the ceiling. She had been given a map for distributing her personnel, but it seemed she needed to draw a great number of new lines on it.

She looked down toward the map on the table once more, but the map and table below it were suddenly knocked away.

Some great force had pushed up on them from below.

“What!?”

She very nearly jumped out of her chair in surprise, but then she saw it.

A square hole had been opened in the floor where the table had been. In other words, it was right below her chair. In other other words, it was between her legs. In other other other words, a spiky-haired boy’s head was approaching in the perfect position to see up her short skirt.

“Wha-...bu-...!! Do you have some kind of grudge against me!?”

“Ask yourself that. And are you multiplying your magic by two billion!? The spell isn’t called ‘inflation’, is it!?”

The sight of the perverted submarine named Kamijou Touma making an emergency surfacing was so shocking that she forgot to kick her chair away and move back.

Once she finally came to her senses, she glanced around without even trying to grab her Symbolic Weapon named the Lotus Wand that was lying on the floor with the map.

“Wait! Wait! Please give me a break! What were you going to do if I was really planning to kill you?”

“You wouldn’t try to kill me after warning me in Japanese and telling me the name of the church. Once I knew everyone functioned as a cannon, that ruled out Aalborg Tower and a Roman Catholic leader would definitely stay in a church. It isn’t a rational thing; it’s more like your instinct. Anyway, I knew I would find someone who knew me if I came here, but you guys got a little carried away and almost vaporized me on the way!!”

“Why are you here?”

“I’ll explain my reasoning, so please overlook us.”

“And if I say no?”

“You’re the breaker, aren’t you?” said Kamijou from his low angle. “I’ve seen several different kinds of Roman Catholic power: the Croce di Pietro, the Queen of the Adriatic, the C-Document, and the Star of Bethlehem. None of them were made with completely parallel functions. There was always a leader in the center and everything was made evenly parallel below that.”

“…”

Kamijou was speaking about an idiosyncrasy of the Christian Church that stated that all mankind was equal yet viewed the Twelve Apostles as special. The Roman Catholic Church in particular said god used his power evenly and people’s beliefs reached god evenly, but they still liked to put an intermediary in between man and god.

In that case…

“Your group is known as the Agnese Forces, so the intermediary here is clearly you. You may just be a breaker in case the others lose control of the spell, but that still means you’re the spell’s Achilles’ heel. If you refuse to cooperate, I’ll do what I have to do. I’ll destroy that inflation magic and leave the rest to Othinus. Or do you have another trump card?”

“That’s what I don’t understand. You were working with the coalition force to stop Othinus from producing her lance, so why are you relying on her now?”

“You’ll listen? You’ll let me explain!? Really!?”

“I have a feeling I’ll regret it. And what’s with this annoying air of someone speaking about their sweetheart or bragging about their pet!?”

If he suddenly told her the world had been destroyed and Othinus had used Imagine Breaker to return it to normal, Kamijou doubted she would understand.

For that reason, he changed his outlook slightly.

“Would you believe a huge amount of time took place between our arrival on Sargasso and the attack on Othinus, but no one in the world realized it?”

“I would have a hard time of it.”

“Then can you explain why Othinus suddenly changed her plan? If she had completed her lance at Sargasso, she could have checkmated the world, so why did she suddenly abandon it and head to Denmark?”

“Now that you mention it…”

Agnese frowned in her chair.

Kamijou was using a psychological trick. One gave an initial demand that would never be accepted and then switched to an easier demand. Statistical data showed that made it easier to accept the second demand than if it had been given first.

He was truly glad he had been paying attention in Komoe-sensei’s class.

“Othinus is trying to give up her power and she needs something in Denmark to do it,” he said slowly. “This isn’t a bad deal for us. Letting her disarm would be more constructive than splitting the earth in two in an all-out war.”

“That would be ideal, but I don’t see why Othinus would have a sudden change of heart. Please don’t try to tell me you seduced her.”

In truth, it was due to the long time that only he and Othinus knew about, but Agnese would never accept that explanation.

He decided to keep it short and with as few lies as possible.

“Othinus was afraid of her power.”

“Even though she filled the world with chaos to obtain it?”

“It was *because* she obtained it. To be honest, she had already completed the lance by the time we arrived at Sargasso. She had used a different method than we expected, but she became a completed magic god and learned the truth of that power. …And that truth did not exactly delight her.”

The most painful part was the fact that he could not explain how Othinus was nearly powerless already.

Explaining it would only spread more confusion, but not explaining it made her out to be a villain.

“Othinus left Sargasso to give up her power as a magic god, but Gremlin will view that as a betrayal. She’s prepared for that and she has come this far. If we act now, we can avoid the clash that would be the worst case scenario both for the world and for Othinus. We might be able to save both of them and I want to bet on that possibility.”

“……”

Agnese remained silent for a while.

Even if she did not understand everything on the emotional level, Kamijou felt he had helped her answer some of the questions concerning the current situation.

“By the way,” she finally said. “What will you do if I still refuse?”

“Then I have no choice but to fight.” He could hear the creaking of his clenched teeth. “But you of all people must know I won’t go down easy when I have someone to protect.”

“Then…”

A heavy sound of metal filled the church.

Agnese had snatched the Lotus Wand from the floor and thrown it overhead.

After the Symbolic Weapon flipped through the air, she grabbed it in one hand.

“It’s time you showed me that fact again!!”

The pressure of attack magic amplified two billion times crushed every inch of the church’s floor.

Part 8

A clattering sound filled Ansgar Church.

Agnese Sanctis stood alone inside the church with the Lotus Wand resting on her shoulder. She was contacting the distant nuns.

“Yes, yes. He came here. I crushed him with the Lotus Wand, but it didn’t seem to have much effect. I didn’t feel a good solid hit, so he may have escaped. Expand the circle.”

Her voice held no emotion.

“He also showed his intent to fight and escape, so abandon the plan to knock him out of the fight early. Yes, tell this to the outsiders as well.”

Her voice held no highs or lows and she went on to state her conclusion.

“Kamijou Touma is wholly on Magic God Othinus’s side and it would be impossible to separate them. As such, there is no way to target her without killing him.”

She ended the communication and let out a short sigh.

She spoke quietly toward the empty church.

“*Now how about you actually start escaping?*”

The church itself was deserted, but a response came from the square hole in the floor.

“Sorry about all the trouble.”

“You had better be. Don’t forget that I have a role to play here. The best excuse I can manage is that Heinous Criminal Kamijou Touma slipped past my attempts to stop him and escaped.”

“I *will* repay you for this.”

“Do you have any idea how difficult this will be? The spell we used is called the Fish of the Supper and it has a few complex conditions that must be met to activate. First, the pope has to personally order it to be released. Second, two billion people must hold a common hatred. All of the world’s fear is currently gathered on Othinus. Not a single one of them – myself included – would think of trying to protect her. Or at the very least, that’s what is widely believed. Reversing that will not be easy.”

“Nevertheless, I will bring this madness to an end. I swear it.”

Agnese scratched at her head.

This method had saved her in the past and it had also tripped her up in the past. Someone who had seen Kamijou Touma from the standpoint of enemy and ally was surprisingly rare.

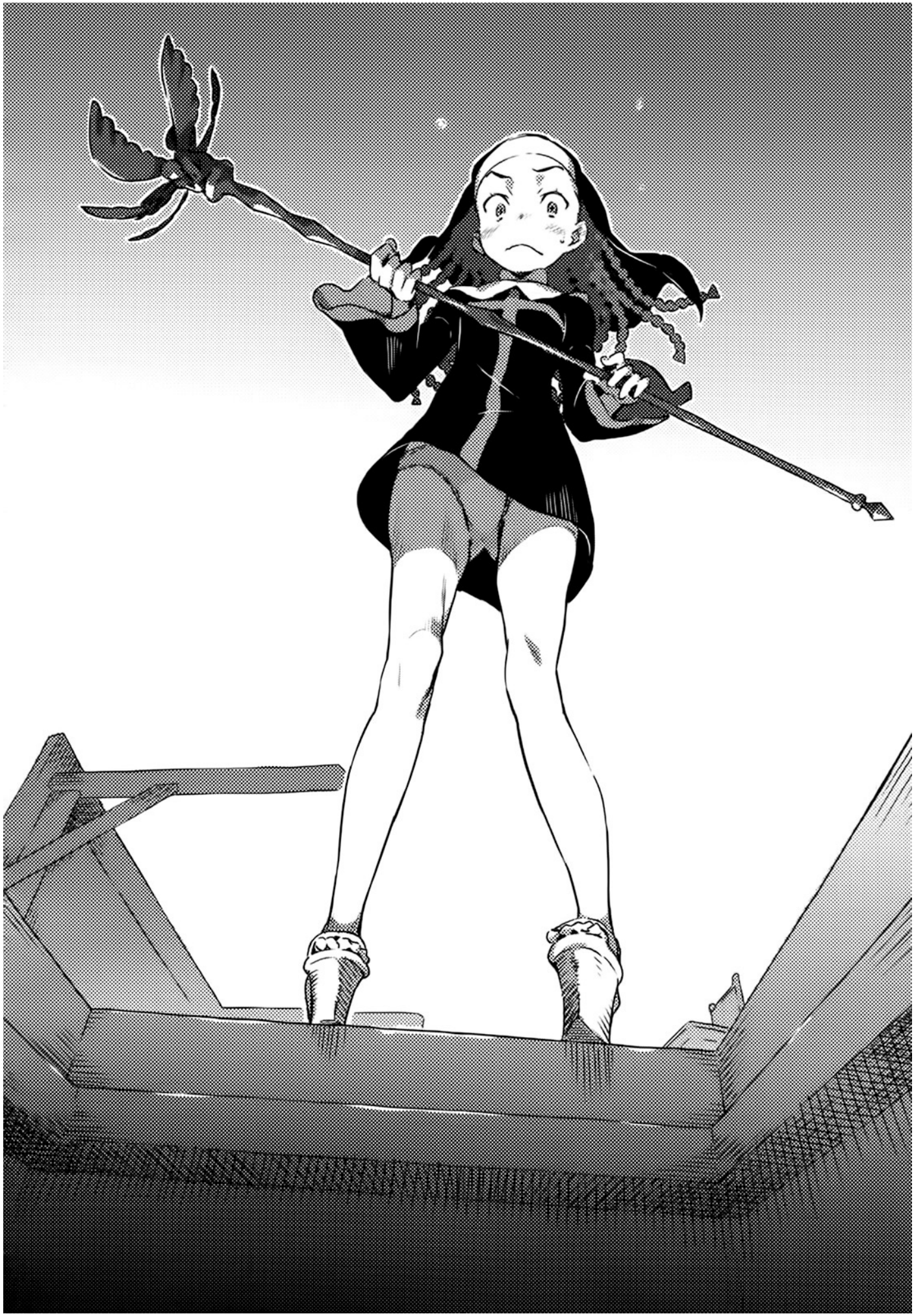
And because of that position, she had made an objective decision to give Magic God Othinus the opportunity to surrender.

It may have been an absurd and extreme decision based on what she had said before, but she knew it was possible that boy was truly thinking something so ridiculous.

(If he pulls this off, it’ll be worthy of a statue in the public square.)

The boy then gave a final comment.

“Oh, and sorry about looking up your skirt this whole time.”



Since she already had the Lotus Wand ready, Agnese once more released a spell amplified two billion times.

CHAPTER 11

V.S. “The Nuns Wavering in God's Majesty”.

Round_03.

Part 1

“Hnn!!”

Magic God Othinus’s grunt was followed by an explosion of dull yet intense pain in Kamijou’s right shoulder.

She had fixed the dislocation.

“Abah! Abababababababah!!”

“Be more careful. Dislocate it too many times and it’ll become a habit.”

“D-do you really think anyone does it for fun?”

They had safely escaped the city of Aalborg, but they had not had time to procure cold weather clothing. The snowy road had little traffic and no opportunity for hitchhiking had presented itself, so they were travelling through the extreme environment on foot once more.

“I thought we could look for coats and a car in the next city, but that was too naïve. We’re gonna die out here. We really are in the middle of nowhere!!”

“We’ll reach the next city after travelling about ten kilometers south. Our pursuers will definitely be waiting for us along the way, though.”

“Ten kilometers on a snowy road in below freezing weather? How is that any different from being stranded?”

“During war, armies often march one hundred kilometers a day in the snow.”

Despite what she said, they gave up partway through.

They were forced to hide in an old car abandoned on the side of the road at around the five kilometer mark.

“Argh! This is hopeless. This has got to be more than ten kilometers!!”

“The cold has become our greatest enemy.”

“This feels like one of those games where you’re caught in a disaster! We won’t have to burn our remaining money to stay warm, will we!?”

The experience was similar to lightly freezing a tangerine, warming it with a kotatsu, freezing it again, and repeating the process.

The abandoned car’s heater would not start and the rusty chassis let in the cold, but it still felt like heaven to Kamijou. They were cut off from the outside air and their body heat gradually warmed the inside of the car.

A while after they settled down in the backseat, a change came over Othinus.

Her witch’s hat began gently swaying back and forth.

“Othinus?”

“Nh.”

The hat stopped moving once he called out to her, but it soon started up again.

“Othinus.”

“Yeah, I’ll admit it. I’ve been feeling really tired for a while now.” She rubbed the eye not covered by an eyepatch. “But we should assume we won’t have a chance to get a good night’s sleep from here on out. The number of pursuers here in Denmark will likely increase as time goes on and their information on our location will grow more accurate too. We should get short bits of rest when we can, even if it’s only five or ten minutes.”

“Just to be sure, *you are okay, aren’t you?*”

“I’m not about to die or anything. In fact, not getting any rest would only make things worse.”

As long as she did not say the fairy spell had caused severe damage to her body, Kamijou had no objections.

A few minutes after he stopped asking questions and started looking outside the grimy window, the intervals of her breathing grew more regular.

She had fallen asleep.

Seeing the glass gradually fog up told him the car was slowly warming, so he breathed a sigh of relief. He then heard something fall to his lap.

He looked down and found Othinus's hat.

He looked over and – if one ignored the fairly imposing eyepatch – found a lovely girl there. Her blonde hair and white skin may have strengthened the impression, but he felt she would look perfectly at home hugging a giant stuffed animal.

This may have been the true essence of a human.

Birthplace, personal history, achievements, crimes, official position, etc. People were bound by many things, but when all that was stripped away, everyone looked fairly similar. Not even a magic god was an exception.

(…)

Kamijou was glad he was able to stand by her side.

He was glad he had not given into cheap anger or passion and joined those who would cast her aside.

With a faint smile, he toyed with the witch's hat in his lap.

But then he slowly looked up.

Through the filthy windshield and past the falling snow, he saw something that did not belong. Two points of red seemed to reject the pure white of that silver world. His expression silently changed when he realized he was seeing special nun's habits.

He said nothing to Othinus.

He merely placed the hat on her blonde head and opened the abandoned car's door.

He would stand by her side and it was once more time for him to prove it with his actions.

Part 2

Kamijou walked across the white snow.

His opponent this time was a group of two. He had only noticed them four or five hundred meters from the car because of their red nun's habits. He recognized that red outfit, but he technically did not know these people. As he approached, he recalled that strange interpersonal diagram.

“Sasha, you sure have strange tastes. It’s seven below zero, so why are you wearing that formfitting restraint outfit? Are you the type that wears shorts year round?”

“My answer: I would be wearing a normal coat if it were not for unnecessary instructions from you. An additional explanation: I would also avoid wasting so much magic power on life support.”

“Fwa hah hah!! A coat over that restraint outfit? You might think that reduces the exhibition angle, but it actually takes it to a whole new level!! But I wouldn’t expect any less from my Sash- dwefh!?”

The pair was speaking in a foreign language as they approached him, but he was not about to mistake his position here. Their cheerful and casual behavior was certainly not directed toward him.

One of the pair was Sasha Kreutzev.

Kamijou had met her in the past, but that had only been Archangel Gabriel using her outer appearance. They were technically not acquainted and he could not rely on that meeting to determine what magic she used.

The other was a complete unknown. He could guess she belonged to the Russian Orthodox Church due to wearing a habit the same color as Sasha’s, but that was all.

The Russian Orthodox Church was one of the three great Christian denominations alongside the Anglican Church and the Roman Catholic Church.

The Roman Catholics had shown kindness, but that would not happen here. After all, he was not acquainted with them. And as one of those three great denominations, they could easily use some secret spell on the same level as the one used in Aalborg.

As Kamijou trudged through the snow, he called out to them.

“Do you understand Japanese?”

“I don’t have any real reason to answer you, but yes.” The older woman laughed and pointed first at herself and then at the girl. “I’m Vasilisa and this is Sasha. Not that you need to know that.”

She smiled and the pair came to a stop.

They already knew what they had to do. No cheap persuasion was needed. The words the woman spoke and the smile on her face were given under the assumption of a fight.

…Is this the world you wanted to see?

During that infinite hell, Othinus had asked him that question time and again.

The question had been meant to pressure him, but it had also pressured her.

(I already know this isn't a perfect world. I've seen perfect with my own eyes, so I know that all too well.)

Kamijou Touma gave his answer in his heart.

(But even if it's imperfect and incomplete, I still want to be glad I was born into this world. I want to be proud of that fact!!)

He stopped once he reached a set distance from the pair.

"Is there any way to avoid a fight here?"

"Trying to persuade us with some sob story won't work, so don't bother. You can do that in some dark basement, so this really isn't the place for it anyway."

"How do you view me?"

"My answer: in your past interactions with Gremlin and your direct meeting with Othinus on Sargasso, she may have made some form of contact. Whether your interests happened to align or she used some sort of suggestion spell is still under investigation."

"I see."

That answer seemed to puzzle the two nuns.

The puzzlement likely came from his lack of argument, but Kamijou's understanding came from something else.

"I was just thinking how tough it is to be a hero of justice," he continued. "Seeing it from the outside gave me a renewed appreciation of that fact. After all, it clearly doesn't make sense. You have to have had doubts about Magic God Othinus's and my actions and that answer can't have been enough. What happened with Sargasso? What about the production of the lance? You can't explain why she threw all that away and fled to Denmark. Not only that, but she left all her trustworthy Gremlin members behind and brought a single pawn whose aligned interests or suggestion could be undone at any time."

"There's no real reason for us to understand it."

"*That's the answer you wanted*. That's all there is to it." He spoke as if challenging her. "You wanted to think your opponent was absolute evil with no room for argument. That way you could stand on the side of justice as you crushed her with unquestioned violence. Anything else would've been a problem."

He silently yet tightly clenched his fist.

“Even the slightest shred of goodness in Othinus would be a problem for the ‘heroes of justice’ who hurt her, wouldn’t it?”

He spoke not to Vasilisa and Sasha. He was declaring war on the *much larger gears of the world* that stood behind them.

“Pathetic. I’m not about to condone what Othinus did, but what you’re doing isn’t much different.”

A dull sound exploded through the silver world.

Kamijou Touma and Sasha Kreutzev took action at the same moment. They ran full speed along the shortest path, Sasha swung down her L-shaped crowbar, and Kamijou forcibly grabbed the grip of the tool.

Hot pain burst through his entire palm and blood dripped from between his thumb and forefinger.

However, the metal crowbar broke like it was made of packed sand. It may have had some sort of magical effect.

Kamijou had no need to focus on that one tool.

What mattered was using the instant that his enemy’s trusty attack had been negated to bring his fist in range.

He clenched his fist with such force that he could have sworn it produced a creaking noise.

To prevent her from reading the timing, he even stopped his breathing as he threw the punch.

“...!!”

Just before impact, his pivot leg slid to the side. Sasha had determined she could not evade, so she had swept his leg out from under him. But by the time he realized that, he had already tumbled spectacularly into the snow.

“Here.”

Vasilisa casually tossed something the size of a drink can toward Kamijou as he lay on his side.

(What? Is that a grenade!?)

It was a wild assumption, but it was not an impossibility given the situation. At any rate, he rolled to the side to move as far away as possible.

But it was not a grenade.

It was an extremely professional-looking radio that likely belonged to the Russian military.

“Ksshh… Can you hear me, Kamijou Touma?”

(…?)

The voice from the radio spoke Japanese and the speaker was likely younger than Kamijou. He was unsure whether the high-pitched soprano voice belonged to a boy or a girl.

Naturally, he did not have time to leisurely listen to the voice. Sasha pulled an unrefined saw and pair of pliers from the belt at her waist and charged in, so he kicked up some snow to blind her.

“We have constructed a unique spell to use against the magic god,” continued the voice. “It is not meant for use against humans, but it should be plenty effective against you. Will you still challenge us even after hearing that?”

“Like hell that’d stop me!! I never thought one of the three great denominations would only send two people! That’s far too kind for this world!!”

He had no time to check to see if Sasha had flinched back, so he hurriedly stood up while jumping back.

“Old cannibal woman of the one-legged house.”

A female voice with a bewitching ring to it oozed into his ears. He did not know what it was saying as it was speaking Russian, but the tone was enough to make his spine tremble in eerie discomfort.

Vasilisa had secretly kept a safe distance behind Sasha’s fierce attacks.

“Please give me the skull lamp. Please give me the skull lamp to burn my cruel stepmother and sister to death.”

A ring of roaring flames spiraled around Vasilisa.

“Shit!!”

He removed his jacket and wrapped it around his left arm.

A moment later, Vasilisa’s crimson flames expanded. The explosive flames quickly approached while instantly melting the snow on the ground. There was nowhere to evade to, so negating it with his right hand was the only option.

As he twisted his body and raised his right hand, Sasha approached from a different angle to slice him. She swung her saw horizontally to tear through his chest from the side.

But Kamijou had not removed his jacket in order to deal with Vasilisa's flames.

If he used his right hand to deal with those, he had known he would have to handle the next attack without his right hand.

"!!"

The serrated saw blade tore into the jacket wrapped around his arm, but it did not reach his skin.

(My right hand destroyed that crowbar, so the same should work here!!)

He swung his left arm as hard as he could and threw aside the jacket, but the jacket did not even fall to the ground. Several long narrow scraps came apart and blew in the wind.

"…"

The eyes hidden behind blonde bangs viewed their target at close range.

Kamijou had now negated Vasilisa's flames, so he was free to use his right arm.

"I see. You overcame many dangers, brought World War III to an end, and even stood in the center during the conflict with Gremlin. You thought someone like that would have a chance to accomplish what others could not."

The radio began speaking from the snow once more, but Kamijou ignored it.

His right fist struck the large pliers and Imagine Breaker destroyed the spiritual item.

(I can do this.)

He tightly clenched his fist once more.

(I need to start with one. If I concentrate on one of them and take them out, the threat of attacks on multiple fronts is gone. This opponent can "only" use magic. I just have to force my way forward until my fist is in range! I can defeat this enemy!!)

It happened a moment later.

"But that means a special individual such as yourself is trampling on the wishes of the whole. Isn't that a bit prideful?"

Kamijou's legs suddenly collapsed out from under him.

Part 3

No intense pressure had appeared from above. Nor had invisible hands dragged him to the ground.

It was the opposite of that.

The strength inside him had vanished. Unlike a poison or numbness, it felt like the upper limit of his strength had been lowered.

His inner ear was shaken and he fell to one knee as if he were anemic.

“What…? Is this a…long-range attack?”

“It is one part of our anti-magic god process. I did warn you it would affect you.”

(Is this a type of psychological attack or memory manipulation?)

If supernatural power took the form of a sword or bullet, dealing with it was easy. He merely had to destroy it with his right hand as it approached. But the type that peered into his heart or stimulated his emotions was different.

An attack with no medium could not be negated beforehand even with his right hand. He could not deal with something invisible or untouchable.

(But I just have to touch the affected part of my body. It’s not a 100% guarantee, but it’ll fix some things!!)

While crouching down on the snow, he hurriedly touched his legs and upper body. As soon as his palm reached the point directly over his heart, he felt like a thick rubber band had snapped and his body was freed.

But…

“This could be called the Russian Orthodox Church’s secret spell and it required funding and preparations on a national level. Isn’t it prideful to think you can overcome it so easily just because you have a special right hand?”

As Kamijou tried to stand, his strength left once more.

No matter how much strength he gathered, his muscles would not tighten. It was incredibly frustrating for his body to not do what he asked.

“Christianity and plenty of other religions have made their own compromises between differing traditions and legends. For example, Shinto took in Buddhism and the Hindu gods to create what is known as the Shinbutsu-Shugo. Christian editors have altered

documents and caused Celtic, Norse, and other religions to lose their original form. In Christianity, we view the gods of other religions as demons, accept the heroes of other religions as our patron saints, and do plenty of other things as well."

Kamijou was reminded of the concept behind the fairy spell, but there was no need to mention that here. If he gave this opponent a hint that led to the development of an even nastier spell, it would be Othinus who suffered.

"But we changed that method of compromise a bit," said the cold voice. "This spell brings other gods into *our system* and then reevaluates them by judging them according to our rules. Lust, pride, sloth, gluttony, envy, greed, and wrath. Let's start with the simple Seven Deadly Sins. Power obtained in an improper manner is not permitted and each sin will eliminate 1/7 of that power. Once all seven are gathered, you will lose even the strength needed to move the muscles of your heart, so be careful."

Two figures approached through the snow.

If Kamijou was defeated here, they would target Othinus with this power.

As they had announced, they would not listen to what he had to say and they would simply tear the girl apart based on the reasoning of the victor. They were not even trying to see who she truly was and they would celebrate with a fancy parade afterwards.

Kamijou's fist creaked, but the radio continued speaking.

"As long as it accomplishes your goal, you have no problem punching girls in the face? Such horrible wrath."

More strength left his body.

If the speaker had been telling the truth, he had 5/7 of his normal strength.

"Don't be…ridiculous. When lives are on the line, who wouldn't get angry!?"

"And so you shouldn't even try? How slothful."

He felt dizzy.

He was kneeling on the snow and he could not stand back up. He was gathering every last ounce of strength, yet he was having difficulty supporting himself at all.

And his opponents did not hold back.

Sasha Kreutzev swung a hammer horizontally as if swinging it in a circle. The blow would hit his face and crush his cheekbone. He did not have it in him to focus on everything at once, so he simply used his arm to protect his face.

After a dull sound and intense pain, he was knocked sideways to the snow.

“Why are you going this far to help Magic God Othinus?” continued the voice.

Kamijou wished he had started by crushing that radio underfoot, but it was too late now.

“Was it greed for the magic god that was such a threat to the world? Or were you simply moved by lust for her appearance? Either way, you are filled with base desires.”

2/7.

Even rising enough to crawl was difficult and he felt something oozing out of his mouth. It took several seconds before he realized that it was drool and that he had almost no strength left in his jaw.

If his right hand touched his heart, he would be temporarily freed from these bonds, but his hazy mind made even that simple task difficult.

The distance from his fingertips to his heart was much too great.

“That leaves gluttony and envy.”

The nuns trudged toward him through the snow once more.

“But I’m sure you understand already. You yearned to be on the side of justice. That is the role for large religions such as us, but you wanted to believe you could accomplish it on your own. You envied us. That is a definite sin.”

He could not breathe properly.

Feeling gradually left his fingertips.

If he could only use his right hand, he had a chance to eliminate an invisible attack such as a psychological one after the fact. (There were of course exceptions.)

But if it brought immediate death before he could use his right hand, it was all over.

He was at 1/7.

One more and it was checkmate. His muscles would lose all strength and he would be unable to keep his heart beating.

“Only gluttony remains.”

But something seemed off in Kamijou’s hazy consciousness.

He examined each of the sins the voice on the radio had charged him with.

“Gluttony is normally used to mean eating more than necessary, but it technically has a wider interpretation. The sin of gluttony forbids any excessive eating, drinking, or drunkenness.”

The diaphragm moving his lungs was not moving properly and the lack of oxygen was preventing his brain from functioning properly.

His consciousness faded in and out as the voice continued.

“And couldn’t we sum up your current state as ‘intoxicated’? Once again, that is quite a sin.”

Part 4

All seven had been gathered and the boy’s last strength had been taken from him.

Sasha Kreutzev stepped up to Kamijou Touma and poked at his head with her finger, but he did not react. The falling snow was trying to blot out his skin with a thin layer of white.

“Sasha, what are you doing with that corpse?”

“My answer: it would be a problem if he is feigning death and I have received reports of the head Norse god using corpses. We cannot let our guard down just because he is dead.”

“Then are you going to take him home with you? I think they might complain at customs.”

“An additional explanation: I wish to eliminate the possibility of the corpse beginning to move after it is transported to Russia. So…”

Sasha adjusted her grip on the saw and held it to the boy’s neck.

“I will thoroughly destroy the body so it cannot be reused. This ends now.”

She did not hesitate. That was how much of a threat she saw in Kamijou Touma…no, in Magic God Othinus.

But the saw was stopped as she swung it down.

To repeat, Sasha and Vasilisa had no reason to show kindness here.

“No…”

Thus there was another reason for this.

“This isn’t over yet.”

With that said, Kamijou’s right fist smashed Sasha’s saw.

He slowly tried to stand up like a broken clockwork doll and he would clearly be no threat in a purely physical battle.

He should have been wrung dry by the Seven Deadly Sins and his heart should have stopped beating after his strength reached zero.

It was unclear how he had escaped that situation, so Sasha quickly tried to finish him off.

But Vasilisa stopped her with an outstretched hand and Kamijou shouted out.

“Is silencing people with violence and not hearing them out how your god does things!? If so, that’s an incredible level of pride!!”

“Not good!!”

Vasilisa’s cry was not in response to Kamijou’s words.

It was in response to where those words were directed.

(Cutting off his words with violence is prideful. If our boy views it that way, our intervention will work against him!! We can’t interfere any further!!)

“That was a mistake. You messed up, Russian VIP. Instead of trying to force that last deadly sin, you should have had these two finish the job with six out of seven complete. That was your mistake.”

“What are you talking about?”

“Trying to pin gluttony on me was a little too forced. Even if it applies to drinking and drunkenness too, that’s a sin related to alcohol. Trying to say someone who’s only had vegetable scrap soup is gluttonous because he’s ‘drunk on himself’ is as ridiculous as trying to tie up the tiger in a folding screen,” said Kamijou. “And because not even you were confident in that sin, the last one didn’t work. Gluttony never activated and that’s when it all came to me.”

Slowly but surely, strength gathered in his legs and he stood up on the snow once more.

“These Seven Deadly Sins you prepared aren’t a spell that automatically activates to punish any sins on the battlefield.”

He recalled each of the sins in turn.

Wrath? Perhaps. As the possibility of solving the problem with talking was swept aside and he had to use strength instead, he may have felt some anger.

Pride? Perhaps. He felt he could save Othinus and he felt he alone stood by her side. If he changed his viewpoint somewhat, that might look like he was reveling in his sense of superiority over others.

Sloth? Perhaps. He had declared he would save Othinus, but he could not think of any concrete method of doing so and had been saved by her own ideas. It was not surprising that some would view that as lazy.

Envy? Perhaps. As he watched people pursue a single girl using enough power to move nations and the entire world, could he really say he had no dark feelings of what he could do differently if he had that much power?

Lust? Perhaps. He said he simply wanted to save this girl who had nowhere else to turn, but could he truly say for certain that there was not the slightest bit of ulterior motive mixed in below that desire?

He had faced his shameful regrets and desires in that infinite hell and he would no longer deny the ugly feelings and desires lurking at the bottom of his heart.

But…

Gluttony? Could that really be applied to him?

And most of all…

Greed? What?

His motive was making Othinus's great power his own?

Even though *she was a delicate and weak existence that would soon stop breathing if left alone?*

"Your spell works based on the judgment made by you as you watch on from outside the battlefield. You find fault in other religions and strip them of their power. It doesn't matter if you're right or not! That spell takes your one-sided complaints and transforms them into real attacks!! That's truly horrible, but once I know how it works, I can use it to my advantage!!"

"Use it to your advantage? Are you saying your individual desires can outdo the efforts of a large organization? Do you prioritize your own morals that much higher than those of others!? That is an astonishing amount of pride!!"

"Perhaps."

Kamijou readily admitted it, but that did not mean he had given up resisting.

“I’m not a perfect saint or anything. As long as Othinus can be properly judged, spend a long time making up for her crimes, and smile with me again once it’s all over, that’s good enough for me. This has nothing to do with good or evil. It’s all about my personal desires. …But you were wrong about something.”

Strength gradually returned to his knees and he understood why.

“Being a normal boy doesn’t mean I have to give up on challenging the world!! There are things I won’t agree to, things I won’t accept, and things I won’t give up on. If you think you can suppress all of that with the power of a group, you’re a hell of a lot more prideful than me, Russia!!”

That was the first point of his counterattack.

“And do you not care how much chaos you spread around the world for those things?” asked the voice. “Protecting Magic God Othinus and running away with her is enough of a sin in and of itself!!”

“Which of the seven does that correspond to? No, it doesn’t matter. You want to talk about spreading chaos? I’ll throw that one right back at you, Russia.”

“What?”

“Think about it. Magic God Othinus has truly been made out to be a villain. She is at the center of the world’s chaos. But if she’s killed here, the truth of Gremlin will never reach anyone. Why did this happen? How could it happen? What made it happen? If you kill her without getting a detailed explanation for that, how do you expect people to accept it!?”

“Even so, the vast majority of people would view killing her as safer than letting her escape!! When faced with definite victory and definite peace, the state of people’s hearts can be ignored!!”

“You’re wrong, Russia. You said it yourself: spreading chaos is a sin! Othinus may be the final boss, but will it really bring peace to kill her?”

“Of course it will!!”

“It won’t. Oh, and was that wrath?”

A mocking tone filled Kamijou’s voice as he pointed out the second sin.

“Who would believe you if you said Othinus was dead? The remnants of Gremlin would definitely claim she still lived and what would the rest of the world think? If you suddenly said someone so dangerous was dead but refused to give any details, do you really think

they would just accept it!? Even if she dies, people's fear of her would remain!! People would speculate that she's hiding out somewhere or someone is her reincarnation and all sorts of false accusations would be made. If you don't go through the proper process, no one will be able to accept the truth. Doing that would bring a century of chaos, Russia!!"

"Are you trying to say she would become a sort of legend?"

"Nonsense, isn't it? But that's probably what would happen. Her threat has spread throughout the world, but most people don't even know if she's male or female. I doubt it would feel real when people hear a vague existence like that has been eliminated. Even if you display pictures of the corpse or even the corpse itself in a museum, people will whisper that you framed an innocent person or that it was a body double. The reality of the situation would be destroyed in an instant and the unseen fear would return."

"We could eliminate that fear by continually providing accurate information in that coming age. That is no reason to forgive what she has done!!"

"Perhaps not, but how many people would die in the process? How many people would die who would have survived had you let Othinus surrender? Can you really call that a 'trivial' sacrifice? If you aren't willing to put in the effort to do the best job possible, isn't that called sloth?"

That was the third sin.

"…!!"

"And another thing. Why is the Russian Orthodox Church so desperate to kill her? Is it because you want the honor of defeating her for yourself? Isn't it wrong to want honor so much you're willing to sacrifice people you've never even met? Some might call it greed."

Kamijou brought the radio to his mouth as he indicated the fourth sin.

"Or is it jealousy? There was nothing good about World War III for Russia and America has been demonstrating its power since Gremlin rose to the forefront. That gives you another reason to want this victory for yourselves. Can you really say that there is not a hint of that feeling behind this?"

The fifth sin.

"Oh, right. Where are you now? A Russian palace? Or the UN headquarters building? Either way, you must be relaxing in a warm room with a roof over your head. Enjoying some tea or coffee while people are risking their lives in battle might qualify as gluttony, you know?"

The sixth.

“Why?” The voice that could belong to a girl or a boy spoke probingly. “Why are you going this far to stand by the magic god’s side? You should have no reason to behave like this.”

“Perhaps not. At the very least, I didn’t until I set foot on Sargasso. I innocently believed everything would return to normal if Othinus was defeated and I was willing to take the first shot against her.”

“Then why would you-…!?”

“I have a reason.” Kamijou cut in before the voice finished. “I do have a reason. You wouldn’t believe me if I explained it, but I’m not doing this without a good reason. However, it was you who suddenly attacked me without listening. You became obsessed with the idea that it would be easier to just kill and you lost your humanity.”

He spat out the words of his judgment.

“You’ve never actually met Othinus and you’ve never spoken with her, so this isn’t something you would understand. You cast aside that option and decided it would be too troublesome to face her in the very, very end, so you thought it was easier to just kill rather than patiently talking it out. That would be the root sin behind all of your other sins.”

Part 5

The radio fell silent.

All strength had returned to Kamijou Touma’s muscles, so it seemed the “battle” was over.

“Come to think of it, I couldn’t force lust onto you. I guess it stops at six.”

He tossed the radio into the snow, but it was not over yet.

Sasha Kreutzev and Vasilisa, the two-man combat team, were still there.

“Well? Will you continue this without any support?”

“It’s something worth considering, but I think we’ll call it quits this time,” answered Vasilisa. “We could forcibly kill you now, but that would probably lead that boy to trap himself in the Seven Deadly Sins. Damn. Maybe we should’ve taken a lesson from the Roman Catholics and prepared a breaker on the scene.”

She cheerfully raised her hands and waved them, but Kamijou was certain the smile on her face would not budge even as she killed someone. That made it more frightening than eerie.

“Oh, right. We can’t touch you because that spell is still active, but I’ll give you a piece of advice.”

“?”

“It’s about the scope of the spell. First, it includes any Russian Orthodox believer within a certain range. Second, it includes anyone the Patriarch has deemed an enemy. To do that, he needs a name, a photo, and some way of sensing the individual with one of his five senses. Any such individual falls under the overall scope of the Seven Deadly Sins spell.”

“What are you talking about?”

“A blind spot.”

Vasilisa’s smile remained as she spoke.

“In other words, *if an assassin that is not a Russian Orthodox believer kills you, it will not feed back to our boy*.”

By the time he caught on, it was too late.

After a dull sound on the side of his head, Kamijou Touma’s consciousness was instantly taken from him.

CHAPTER 12

V.S. “The Four Demon-Slaying Swords”.

Round_04.

Part 1

Kamijou was unsure how long he had been unconscious.

He shook his hazy head and saw the white sky covered in snow clouds.

He could feel a low rumbling in his gut. The sound was coming from below, so he wondered if the ground was shaking. While still lying on his back, he looked down and gave a confused look.

First, he was on a wooden floor as large as a school gym.

Second, he could see the white sky to the side as well.

(Where am I? This isn’t just the ground. In fact, it isn’t the surface at all. Is this place flying through the air!?)

“Do not get up.”

He heard a low male voice below…no, within the cold sky.

He recognized that voice.

“We do not particularly care about you. It would be best if you simply watch as we bring this to an end.”

“Acqua…of the Back?”

He had once been a member of God’s Right Seat and was supposedly imprisoned by the Anglican Church.

That told Kamijou who his opponent was this time.

“Oh, you’ve woken? How boring. Letting you freeze here on the deck would have been a decent punishment for causing so much trouble around the world.”

“Second Princess Carissa.”

“Should we really have done this? We already had what we needed to handle Magic God Othinus. We did not have any real reason to bring him with us.”

“Knight Leader.”

“We don’t know what the other Gremlin members are doing. It’s possible they would have met up with that boy, so I see nothing wrong with nipping that conflict in the bud.”

“And…Kanzaki Kaori!?”

He had learned all too well how powerful these four were during the British coup d’etat known as British Halloween. He could not handle even one of these monsters and four of them were gathered here.

He got up without thinking and began backing away from them, but that distance was trivial against an opponent that could exceed the speed of sound.

And more importantly…

“Hold on there,” said Carissa. “You can back away if you want, but you’ll fall off if you go too far. This thing doesn’t have any railings.”

“…?”

He frowned and Kanzaki continued.

“This is a mobile fortress named Hotel Ariel which is floating at an altitude of 1500 meters. You can think of it as a 30 kilometer fish that swims through the sky. We are currently on the fish’s head.”

“……”

This was an indisputable checkmate.

Even if he miraculously defeated those monsters, he had nowhere to run.

“Do you understand the situation now?”

“Wait… Where’s Othinus!?”

“How would knowing that help you?”

Carissa held something between her index and middle finger. It was a sharp fragment of silver metal. The fragment came from Curtana Second which symbolized England and could simultaneously cut through all dimensions.

With a quick swing, a brightly glowing sword of light appeared.

“This gigantic piece of junk acts a booster giving me limited use of Curtana’s power outside of England. I don’t even need to get close to that magic god. I can chop her to pieces while keeping my distance.”

Othinus was apparently still on the surface and Carissa would create a sword measuring more than 1500 meters and cut her apart from the sky.

Kamijou knew just how sharp Curtana was.

It did not matter how hard the object was. That blade could simultaneously cut through all dimensions, so the target would be cut in two along with any shield it tried to hide behind.

If that was turned against Othinus now that she had lost her powers…

“You’re…kidding, right?”

“I wish I was. I don’t like heading into battle with no guarantee this will kill her. But even if it doesn’t, it will slice her apart. In the worst case, we can gather all of the living parts, bottle them up, and seal them around the world to eliminate the threat.”

The tone of her voice made it clear this was no idle threat.

She seemed truly concerned this was insufficient to kill a magic god.

No one questioned the excessive use of force. Once this truly did chop Othinus into tiny pieces, they would likely all tilt their heads in confusion.

With that in mind, Kamijou forcefully slammed his fist into the wooden floor.

It had a tremendous effect.

That mobile fortress was moved by magical power, supported magical power, and amplified magical power, so its deck mercilessly crumbled. Kamijou and the other four on the “fish’s head” fell inside it.

The inside of the fortress was another vast space. In fact, it was too vast. It was even larger than a school gym. A high school boy with little knowledge of magic could not even guess what the facility was for, but the lines of rectangular boxes the size of industrial refrigerators reminded him of the university supercomputers that would occasionally appear in the newspaper or on the news.

They fell into that space from directly above.

The fall from about two or three stories up sent an icy feeling along his spine even though the situation was entirely his doing.

However, the four monsters remained unfazed.

Carissa.

Acqua.

Knight Leader.

Kanzaki Kaori.

All of them were a great force that represented Britain and they were all either a Saint or the possessor of an equivalent level of power. They would occasionally move at greater than the speed of sound, they would occasionally singlehandedly wipe out an army, and their power was said to be proportional to a nuclear weapon.

The boy had no way of eliminating the impact of falling from that height. He messed up his landing and heard an unpleasant noise from his right ankle, but the expressions of the other four did not budge.

“He has taken hostile action.”

They all turned toward Kamijou Touma who stood in the center.

The battle would likely end in an instant.

“We will do our best to hold back, but you will probably still die.”

Part 2

The primary premise behind this fight was Kamijou Touma’s inability to exceed the speed of sound.

He could not put up a fight against a Saint or a princess supported by Curtana. Acqua and Knight Leader had supposedly lost their former power, but their magical skill would be far from ordinary. Even with their power lost, they were formidable monsters.

That left nothing for Kamijou to do even if he clenched his fist and faced them.

He was at a disadvantage in pure combat skill and in numbers. This was a poor match for Imagine Breaker, so it was blatantly obvious what would happen if they approached at unthinkable supersonic speed.

Under all those conditions, there was only one thing he could do in the instant the four figures tore through the air and approached.

Out of Carissa, Acqua, Knight Leader, and Kanzaki Kaori, he chose to target just one of them.

He kept his gaze fixed and took a step forward, knowing he could never keep up.

He moved toward Kanzaki Kaori.

As said before, there was nothing he could do in a fight against a Saint and this one in particular did not wholly rely on magic. He would be unable to evade the first strike, not to mention land a punch.

Then what was he trying to do?

The answer was simple.

In that instant, he moved into the path of Kanzaki Kaori's sword. *He intentionally moved to a position of certain death.*

Part 3

Kanzaki Kaori herself was likely the most surprised by that decision.

"What!?"

When she saw his much too reckless decision, she stopped just before drawing Shichiten Shichitou from its scabbard.

She had a certain personality trait.

Salvereooo.

A hand of salvation for the unsaved.

Just as that Magic Name said, *she would never kill no matter the situation*.

(He used that against me?)

She thought while working to rein in her own power.

(No matter where he tried to run, I could correct my course and knock him unconscious. That meant my greatest blind spot was the point directly in front of me where he would be killed no matter what he did!)

He immediately made his next move.

But from the perspective of a Saint who could move at the speed of sound, it would be more accurate to say that he began to make his next move.

His decision was simple.

He did not punch or kick. He crouched down and curled up in a ball.

(Oh, no.)

One method a ninja would use to escape pursuit was to suddenly stop and curl up on the spot. The pursuer would be unable to brake fast enough, so the ninja would escape the pursuer's swinging sword and trip them.

Kanzaki could not eliminate her momentum, but striking him with her foot at this speed would undoubtedly smash him to pieces. She immediately hopped up to jump over him, but the tip of her boot caught on the edge of his clothing.

Kanzaki could feel the boy's ribs crying out through her foot, but focusing on that had been a mistake.

Carissa, Acqua, Knight Leader, and Kanzaki Kaori had rushed in from all four directions to deal with Kamijou Touma.

There was naturally another attacker on his other side.

"Ah."

She spoke in surprise and collided with Knight Leader at tremendous speed. Even if the boy's fist could not cause much damage, another monster was a different story. The sound of destruction that burst out rivalled that of Kamijou's ribs a moment before.

While still curled up and vomiting up blood, Kamijou slammed his fist against the floor again.

Everything collapsed and the boy felt an unpleasant floating sensation.

Part 4

"Tch!!"

As she fell, Carissa raised her voice while stabbing her sword into the wall to slow her fall.

"Where is he trying to go!? No matter what he does, he can't escape this prison at 1500 meters!!"

She landed on the lower level and found Acqua who had jumped down ahead of her. He had apparently lost sight of Kamijou Touma, but the wall had been destroyed.

"I see. So that was his plan," muttered the large man without answering Carissa's question. He then shouted upwards. "Is Kanzaki Kaori stopping him!?"

"Eh? Oh, now that you mention it, she's gone."

Acqua frowned at Knight Leader's response from overhead.

Carissa pulled her sword of light from the wall and spoke.

"I suppose searching each and every room is our only option. He's going to be cornered in the end, so I hope we can avoid any unnecessary damage."

"We may not have time for that."

"What?"

"I've figured out what he's after, but it relies on others a bit too much to call it a proper plan."

Part 5

Kamijou's tactic was incredibly simple.

The direction did not matter. He simply continued destroying walls and floors with his right hand to reach an edge of Hotel Ariel as quickly as possible.

And what did he do then?

That too was simple: He jumped off.

"Gaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!???"

Despite it being his decision, he began screaming after he flung himself into the sky and the wind raged about him. He had decided to jump off a building and kill himself in that infinite hell, but he would have chosen a different method had he known it was this frightening.

He dove from 1500 meters.

Naturally, Imagine Breaker had no ability to help him in this situation.

He was relying on something else.

"You idiot!!!!"

A female voice burst out from much closer than he had expected.

It belonged to Kanzaki Kaori who had jumped from Hotel Ariel just like him.

"Ah ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha ha!! I knew you'd come for me! You won't allow people to die no matter what, so I trusted you to help me if I ran down a path of absolute destruction!!"

"Are you stupid!? No, really! Are you stupid!? You mean you didn't give this any actual thought!? You threw away all hope of surviving on your own and relied on me!? And did you really believe I would conveniently decide to join your side for no reason!?"

"It doesn't matter whose side you're on! In a way, you're way better suited to being a hero than me!! If you see someone about to die, you have the power needed to save them whether they're an enemy or an ally! …Yeah, that's right. I may be an enemy to you right now, but you wouldn't let that enemy die so easily. That's what happened, isn't it!?"

"…!!!!!!"

Kamijou could have sworn the sound of her grinding teeth reached him.

Due to how high up they were, they had time to continue speaking even as they fell at tremendous speed.

“But in that case, why were you sent on a mission to kill Othinus!? Did you think it was okay just because she’s a magic god? Did you justify it because you thought she’s on a higher level and won’t die after being chopped up by Curtana!? Let me be very clear: that decision will make you suffer. Even if the entire mission went perfectly and peace filled the world, you would be suffering the entire time!!”

“Oh, honestly!!”

She grabbed his collar, slammed her forehead into his, and continued shouting from close range.

“I don’t need you lecturing me while acting all high and mighty!! And do you even have a way of resolving this other than eliminating her!?”

“Don’t beat around the bush with euphemisms, Kanzaki! Say you’re going to kill her!!”

“…”

“No matter her origin or background, Othinus began as a normal human. You need to remember that!!”

“……!!!!????”

That was likely the last thing Kanzaki wanted to hear.

She had likely prepared argument after argument to do everything she could to avoid looking at that fact.

She clenched her teeth so strongly Kamijou was afraid she was about to bite right through his head, but then she spoke quietly.

“Is there one?”

“One what?’

“Another way!? A way to end this without killing Magic God Othinus! Is there some convenient other way!?”

“That’s what we were trying to do until all of you interrupted!!”

She loudly clicked her tongue.

Even when part of an organization, magicians focused on the individual over the whole. When she thought on the Magic Name in her heart, she knew what she should do concerning Othinus.

“It thoroughly irritates me that you used this part of me so easily, but we can start by making a safe landing.”

“Great. But how are you going to slow us down? We don’t have a parachute.”

“I want to punch you right here and now!!”

While quickly falling, she grabbed his collar and shook him. That violent behavior would have immediately gotten her license revoked if skydiving.

“I will use the Nanasen wires. By spreading them out and slicing the air, we will slow down. It may be closer to creating lift with a great number of wings than using a parachute.”

“I don’t care as long as we can survive.” Kamijou pointed straight up while she held his collar. “And is it just me or is that glowing like crazy? I-it looks like that princess is on a rampage!!”

Their distance finally gave him a full view of the giant manmade fish named Hotel Ariel, but the stomach of the fish was suddenly sliced apart from the inside. The sword of light was visibly growing and it finally reached a kilometer in length.

“Not good. She’s planning to take us out along with the magic god.”

“Uh, ohhh. This is baaaad. I’d definitely die if that hit meee. If only a Saint could use her full power to repel it and- bggbvh!!!??”

Kamijou finally received an iron fist to the face and heard an unpleasant noise from his neck. Kanzaki could not suppress her anger, but it was true she had to deal with this.

“I’ll slow us down first!! Please hold on tight!!”

“What exactly are you going to do!?”

“Curtana technically only works inside the United Kingdom. Think of this as the second princess relaying the source of its power via the mobile fortress.”

He reached his arms around from behind and almost touched her chest, so she swung her fist down. From his lower position, he almost buried his face in her butt, so she swung her fist up. After that, he covered his face with his hands and started sobbing, so she wrapped his arms around her waist and continued her answer.

“I will form a three-dimensional magic circle with my wires to embed additional magical symbols that will disturb that relay route. It will divert her power to the side…no, in a U-turn and destroy Hotel Ariel itself!!”

Part 6

Following the supposed meteorite near Hjørring, a giant flash of light was seen in a snowy plain near Aalborg.

The great Saint had not given any thought to the explosive blast, so Kamijou was mercilessly blown away as he tried to cling to her waist. He crashed into a conifer tree forest, received scrapes from the prickly branches, and somehow managed to survive the fall into a thick layer of snow.

It sounded like a joke, but one element was anything but funny.

“Dammit. Y-you’ve gotta be kidding me.”

A thin branch was stabbed into his thigh like a fork a kid had stabbed into a piece of cake. For a while, he could not decide whether he should touch it or not, but nothing would improve if he came to a standstill.

He held his hoodie’s sleeve in his mouth, clenched his teeth, and quickly pulled it out.

As he writhed around in pain, he heard approaching footsteps in the snow.

He grew cautious, but he naturally relaxed once he saw it was Othinus.

A clenched fist struck him a moment later.

“Where have you been!?”

“U-ubfh… Were you running around trying to find me? Young lady, were you worried when you suddenly found I was gone?”

“Those might be your last words. Are you sure you don’t want to say anything else?”

He had no choice but to bow down with all his might.

She stood tall and looked around.

“A lot must have happened while I was asleep. Are these pieces of a mobile fortress scattered around?”

“Yeah. I wonder if people are going to think a UFO crashed.”

“What exactly happened? Even with your right hand, you would have to approach to point-blank range.”

“Um, well, that’s not quite what happened. While I did play a role in destroying it, it wasn’t entirely me.”

As he tried to explain in more detail, sharp sounds of clashing metal reverberated over the entire area.

Kanzaki Kaori was holding off Acqua and Carissa.

Even though Kanzaki was supposedly working with him for the moment, he had a frightening vision of two horns growing from her head and phosphorescence leaking from her mouth. After being used the way she had, it was only natural for her to be angry.

He wondered what would have happened if he had tried it with Carissa or Knight Leader, but it went beyond anything he could imagine.

Thus he made a wise suggestion.

“H-how about we discuss this while we walk? This area is still far too dangerous.”

CHAPTER 13

V.S. “The Blacksmith who Releases the Magic Sword”.

Round_05.

Part 1

After everything, they arrived at the next city on foot.

The city was named Støvring and they had decent success there. They still could not find reasonably priced coats, but they bought a small, cheap thermos. They did not particularly need anything to drink, but it and its mug would function as portable heaters when filled with hot coffee. They also found a truck willing to carry them south to their next destination of Billund. It was a 150 kilometer trip and it would take them from the northern end of the peninsula to the center.

Everything was going well.

Until the long-distance truck carrying them stalled out, that is.

“This isn’t good. Isn’t this what people call being stranded?” groaned Kamijou.

Looking forwards and backwards along the road only showed the white horizon.

Othinus’s senses must have still been dulled as she walked next to him because she looked disinterested and stuck her index finger through the empty mug’s handle and spun it around.

“The driver said there’s a gas station nearby. We just have to swap out the battery and the truck will be up and running again. As long as we have a clear goal, we’re far better off than someone who is truly stranded.”

The driver was fighting his beloved truck in search of any possibility, but there was likely nothing he could do without a new battery.

“That may be true, but you aren’t going to collapse on the way, are you?”

“Giving up on the truck and walking the rest of the way would be 100 times longer than a trip to and from the gas station, so are you sure you’d prefer that?”

The snow grabbing at their feet and the uniformly white ground threw off Kamijou’s sense of distance. He lost track of how far a mere ten meters was and he began to think he would find nothing no matter how far he walked, just like that pure black world.

Fortunately, they arrived at the flat-roofed gas station after walking for three hundred meters.

“Oh, no,” groaned Kamijou. “Is this place self-serve? There’s no one working here!”

“Why is that a problem?”

“I’ve never heard of car batteries sold in a vending machine.”

In addition to the coin-operated gas pumps and half-frozen car wash, there was a boxy office-like space. That space contained new tires, suspensions, and other car parts.

It was possible the station was not self-serve year round and had a worker on site on some days. The worker may have avoided showing up on especially snowy days.

“See, they have batteries,” pointed out Othinus. “Let’s break the glass and take one.”

“Shut up, you Viking. The door isn’t locked and it’s theft to take it just because no one’s around.”

As they spoke, the two of them entered the deserted office. It was an unfamiliar site for a Japanese boy, but it seemed to have simple food and other daily necessities in one corner. The lineup was greater than a train station store and less than a convenience store.

“We just have to leave a bunch of money on the counter, right? Denmark doesn’t have a tipping system, so the unexpected extra money should make the worker happy. About 500 krone should cover it.”

“Sensei, I don’t understand-…”

“That’s about 10,000 yen.”

“Why is everything so expensive!? Can that battery play Blu-rays or something!?”

However, not procuring a new battery would leave them stuck in the blizzard. Kamijou was very nearly in tears at essentially having to burn money to stay alive.

The boy pulled the battery from the cardboard box and attached metal clothespin-like terminals to it. The cables led to a tester.

“What are you doing?” asked Othinus with a frown.

“The box was covered in dust and the colors were faded, so I thought… Damn, I was right. It’s dead. I don’t know if it’s been sitting here for too long or if the cold did it, but it needs to be recharged.”

“Are you going to use the outlet over there? Stealing electricity is theft too.”

“We paid a lot for this, so we can turn a blind eye to a bit of loose change!”

The boke and tsukkomi had completely swapped places from thirty seconds prior. Money had a way of motivating people.

Othinus sat on a sofa in what seemed to be a smoking area.

“Oh, right. While we wait, go borrow some sweet breads from the miscellaneous section over there.”

“Viking.”

“You can always put more money by the register.”

“By the way, are you hungry already? We just got some soup.”

“Do you really think we’ll be able to have a nice well-mannered meal at a restaurant next time we want to eat? I’d rather get some food while I can than have trouble finding any once I’m hungry.”

“The people who say that always end up eating it while carrying it around.”

“What was that?”

After that, the troubles only continued: Kamijou was the one blamed for blueberry being the only flavor of jam bread in stock and he discovered the beef stew bread he was buying for himself was a week past its expiration date.

After the girl essentially wearing a swimsuit and cape grew tired of complaining about human knowledge, she lay down on the sofa.

“By the way, what time is it?”

“Do the clocks even mean anything anymore? When you used that…what was it? Bone Boat? Anyway, you spun the earth around, didn’t you?”

“After rotating everything except the two of us, I rotated the entire heavenly body while we stood on it to put the earth back in its proper position. The international standard time will still work.”

“The scariest thing about a magic god is how you can handle things like that as if it’s a minor annoyance.”

They could not leave the truck waiting for too long, so they stopped recharging the battery after twenty or thirty minutes and prepared to carry it back. The rectangular box was slightly warm and would act as a small oasis in the bleak snowscape.

“The worst thing I can imagine is getting back and finding the truck gone.”

“The driver couldn’t do anything without solving the battery problem, so there’s nothing to worry about unless he froze to death.”

As soon as they left the office/rest area, the snow-covered gas station was suddenly split in two like a fruit.

Both the office and the gas pumps were sliced apart by an invisible blade. Kamijou was unable to properly perceive the entirety of the destruction, so he simply tackled Othinus to the ground to cover her and protect her from the glass shattering before his eyes.

The diagonal slice caused the flat roof to collapse and the gas pumps to fall over. That was when a stinging odor caused Kamijou to grimace.

A large scar was left on the concrete floor and something was gradually staining it. A haze filled the air like sugar water.

“Not good. Get up, Othinus.”

Kamijou grew pale, frantically stood, grabbed Othinus’s slender hand, and pulled her up as well.

“The underground tank was damaged! If we don’t get out of here, the gasoline will ignite!!”

He held the battery in one hand, pulled on Othinus’s hand with the other, and ran.

He moved from the building to the white snow. He did not know if the harsh scent still surrounded them or simply lingered in his nose, but he refused to stop running until it was gone.

However, that refusal was cut short by something else.

Sparks from some broken electronic equipment contacted the vaporized gasoline and the gas station violently exploded from the inside.

The shockwave struck their backs and literally sent them over a meter through the air. After being thrown onto the snow, Kamijou had the breath knocked from him, but taking in a large breath only filled his chest with a scorching pain and made him cough. Even though the flames had not reached him, the heat wave had roasted the surrounding air.

"What…happened?"

His throat would not open up and his voice was hoarse, but Othinus was staring in a completely different direction while lying on the ground nearby.

"Do you remember me?"

The freezing wind carried a female voice.

Kamijou did not recognize the language, but he recognized the voice.

"Do you remember me, Othinus?"

"Marian Slingeneyer," muttered Othinus. "And Mjölnir."

The girl wore glasses and had her long silver hair gathered in two braids. Overalls covered her brown skin. Mjölnir was an object that resembled a cylindrical drum made of stone. Kamijou was unsure whether it was a weapon or a person, but with Marian's skills, it could easily be both.

Marian frowned at Othinus's words and began speaking in Japanese to match her.

"Bersi is dead and I don't know where his dead self is either. But this isn't just about him. Gremlin was fighting all over the world and we haven't heard from a lot of them. Do you understand, Othinus? That's how many people gave their lives to you in order to grant a wish they couldn't grant any other way."

Marian had what looked like gold bracelets on her wrists.

"And that isn't all. There were sacrifices before we joined Gremlin. I'm only standing here now because of all the other people who dreamed of reviving the Dvergr. And it isn't just me. Everyone who desperately made their way to you had dreams they've only held on to after many sacrifices. But you've trampled on all that, Othinus, and I'm going to make you pay for it."

Those bracelets expanded to a diameter of thirty centimeters and remained in place like the rings of Saturn.

“Are those…?”

“Yes. They’re components of the lance you abandoned. You could call them Draupnir. Because you ran off, I had some extra materials for the weapons of the gods. It isn’t as powerful as Gungnir, but it lets me freely bring together any magic sword or divine spear on the level that a human can use. You abandoned everyone’s dreams, but that gave me the power to a kill a god. This is the concentrated power wrung from Gremlin’s blood! *This* is all it’s good for now, Othinus!!!!!”

A bright light burst from her hands and the gold bracelets were gone. In their place was a sheathed sword. That gold glowing sword was legendary in a negative sense and Kamijou had seen it before.

He felt a pain like his heart was being bound by fishing line.

Merely seeing it made him think of death.

That blade was said to end the world when it was removed from its scabbard.

“Dáinsleif!?” asked Kamijou in fear. “You’re using that thing again!?”

“Yes. I said I was going to kill a god, so what’s wrong with using enough firepower to destroy a world or two along with her? Personally, I don’t think this is enough.”

The brown girl held the scabbard in her left hand and the hilt in her right.

“I used Hrímfaxi to get here. It made quite a show, so the others should catch on before long. But I won’t let them interfere. I will definitely finish you here, Othinus.”

In Baggage City, she had driven Kamijou to the verge of death using just the scabbard, but she would not stop there this time.

“And I won’t hesitate any longer, Othinus. I don’t know what you newly discovered about this world, but it’s obvious you did so by crushing us underfoot. I will destroy whatever it was along with you!!”

Marian Slingeneyer gathered strength in her brown hands and held the sword and scabbard horizontally.

She forcefully pulled them apart as if tearing them from each other.

This was a never-before-seen threat.

The blade that would end the world breathed in the icy air.

Part 2

Dáinsleif. Marian Slingeneyer walked across the white snow while wielding that golden sword of dreadful power. Her gait seemed to express her persistent spite. Her legs wobbled unreliably yet she never fell. It was as if the soles of her feet were stuck to the ground with pure black coal tar.

Othinus could not use any real magic, so Kamijou Touma stepped forward in her place.

From a distance of twenty meters, Marian willfully swung the sword as if brushing cobwebs off a tree branch.

“Cut away Olympus of the Greeks. Summon Titan, the cursed giant.”

An instant later, something burst up from directly below Kamijou and raised him up 120 meters.

“Gh…bah!?”

At first, he did not even realize he was holding his breath.

His vision was spinning and filled with white. The distance to the ground quickly grew overwhelmingly large and he finally realized he had been launched to a height rivalling a thirty-story building. Only then did he notice what had launched him so high.

It was a colossal humanoid figure.

A man as large as a high-rise building burst from the ground. That mass of muscle and bones with five meter fists rose up from directly below Kamijou. Rather than being struck, Kamijou had been lifted up on top of the giant. As the boy was swung around in every direction, he was not slammed to the ground far below. He instead fell on the giant’s upper arm which was right below his feet.

“Bgah!! Ghh! Pant pant…cough cough!!”

He began to crawl, coughed again and again, and could not take in a proper breath.

“Are you valuable to Othinus?”

The brown girl stood on the giant’s shoulder about fifteen meters ahead.

“Then I should start by destroying you.”

Marian casually swung the gold blade.

“Cut away the first sun of the Aztecs. Summon Ocelot, the man-eating beast.”

The skin of the giant’s arm swelled up ominously like bubbling from gas in a swamp. That “bubble” burst from within and an earth-colored four-legged beast appeared. It was quite large. At ten meters, it was more than enough to keep a human’s legs pinned to the ground in fear. Simply being a feline wild beast like a tiger or lion would have been bad enough, but this one had a crocodile like head attached.

It was obvious how this beast would attack.

Without time to wipe the cold sweat from his face, Kamijou clenched his trembling hand and the fantasy monster charged at him.

“Shit!!”

He doubted the beast’s physical strength was simply proportional to its size. And at its great size, it could easily crush him to death without even biting him. For an instant, he considered jumping off the bridge formed from the giant’s arm.

But then something else happened.

The giant must have felt as if a lizard were crawling along its skin because it let out a great cry as if it were a steam engine and it slapped at its upper arm.

The palm tore through the air as it approached and it reminded Kamijou of a ninja mansion’s suspended ceiling.

“Ohhhhh!?”

He ran and somehow managed to slip between the meter thick fingers.

The tremendous noise bordered on being an actual shockwave and the large man-eating beast was crushed in an instant. Kamijou himself was knocked up into the air and landed on the back of the hand that had been slammed down.

Marian clicked her tongue and swung Dáinsleif.

The act seemed to double as a punishment for going against her wishes because one of the giant’s arms was sliced through at the shoulder like butter.

The giant let out another cry. The high-rise building of a man went on a rampage like a child stung by a bee and swung its remaining limbs wildly. Kamijou was launched from its hand and into the white sky.

“Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!!???”

There was no ground below his feet.

His body filled with the fear of having that standard fact destroyed.

However, he did not have time to linger on that fear. Marian had already swung the sword and she now spoke the words necessary to complete the spell.

“Cut away Asgard of Norse mythology. Summon Surtr, king of the fiery hell.”

A different part of the snowy plain split open and a larger, pitch-black form rose up.

Like a baseball batter, the demon king wielded his giant flaming sword and waited for Kamijou to arrive.

Part 3

Left on the ground, Othinus loudly clicked her tongue as she looked up at what happened over 100 meters above.

She understood what Marian Slingeneyer was doing, but there was nothing she could do for the boy. The restriction of losing her powers irritated her to no end.

(First, she seals off a limited portion of the world and then she chooses particular phases of different religions or sects and cuts through them.)

The giant that appeared first was one of the Titans that appeared as Zeus’s enemy in Greek mythology.

The beast that appeared second was the man-eating beast and god of death that destroyed the first humanity in Aztec mythology.

The demon king that appeared third was the leader of the giants that were said to burn away the nine worlds in Norse mythology.

(Heaven, Asgard, Mt. Olympus, the Pure Land, Nirai Kanai… Cutting away the homes of the gods removes the protection and blessings of those gods and thus releases the calamities being restrained by the gods. In a way, Marian is able to freely choose and wield the different “endings” told of in the world’s scriptures.)

It sounded extreme, but the basic technique was not all that rare. The ceremonial grounds used in modern Western magic and the cathedrals and churches of Christianity were formed by dyeing a certain space in the colors of a single religion. No one would pray with an image of Buddha sitting next to a cross and a Buddhist priest would not add talismans or mandrake roots as accessories to his rosary. Convenient elements from other religions

would sometimes be adopted, but the simplest way to create the purest and most valuable brand was to maintain a single form and color.

But Marian took that concept to extraordinary levels.

Just as ultra-pure water created by thoroughly removing all impurities behaved differently from normal water, the phenomena created by "cutting off a portion of space to obtain a unique color" had tremendous power.

It was as if she were using a single hand to create and control the refined despair of all the world's religions.

Just as a summoned angel was manifested using condensed Telesma, these rulers of the end were likely masses of the type of power stored in their respective religion or phase. However, these were nothing more than power focused into the images of the calamites people had imagined and so they would not necessarily look exactly like those gods of death or demon kings, but the raw power that presented itself made that fact easy to forget.

"A sword that closes the path to the power of the gods…no, the path to heaven," muttered Othinus.

Before the battle even began, Marian had likely used the sword to cut through the surrounding space and create a sort of barrier around the area. If she had not, the appearance of the different mythical figures would have created a mysterious phenomenon much like Angel Fall. Or the power could have exceeded the limits of the world itself and everything would have shattered like glass.

Having destroyed the world herself, Othinus knew that was no exaggeration.

"That truly is an appropriate weapon for opposing a magic god."

If Othinus had been at full strength, she could have crushed Marian in a single blow.

There would not even be a need to kill her. She could simply throw her into a world of happiness.

But that was no longer the case.

Things had changed.

She could not even produce light from her fingertips, so she had no way of stopping Marian's actions. Her life was so puny that the giant would crush her underfoot and Marian would not even have to turn the sword her way.

This was what Othinus had wanted.

Retrieving the eye she had gouged out was meant to neutralize and defang her so the chaos around the world could end.

Nevertheless, the loss of that power tore at her heart now.

The power refined to kill a magic god was being turned toward a mere boy, yet she could not stop it.

"…?"

Just as Othinus clenched her teeth, she spotted another figure on the battlefield.

"Wait a minute. What are you doing over there?"

The figure said nothing in response.

Part 4

The fire sword flew horizontally.

The seventy meter blade roared with flames and the sound of it slicing the air added a frighteningly deep noise.

This was the same threat as placing a building on its side and swinging it.

As Kamijou flew through the air, he clenched his fist with desperate conviction.

"Ohhhhhaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"

They clashed.

The instant the right fist struck the fire sword, the huge blade broke in two. The outer half of the blade spun through the air and stabbed into the one-armed giant's chest.

That giant screamed and collapsed.

The flames of the sword's bottom half had been extinguished. Kamijou crashed into it and rolled across it, but he did not have time to take a breather. Imagine Breaker's power continued to destroy the giant sword.

It felt like running across a collapsing stone bridge.

He desperately ran toward the base of the sword and the pitch-black giant's arm, but Marian Slingeneyer interrupted.

"Cut away heaven of Christianity. Summon Abaddon, king of evil consumption"

A great number of black objects formed a cloud in front of him. It was a swarm of tens or even hundreds of thousands of locusts. The brown girl rode the swarm like it was cloud in a picture book and it carried her to the giant sword that continued to be destroyed.

"Marian!!"

"Let it end, you brat. Just like our hopes were taken from us for someone's personal convenience!!"

Their gazes clashed between them.

Kamijou forgot all about the crumbling footing approaching from behind and he clenched his fist with all his might as he faced the enemy before him.

A voice answered him.

"Cut away Takama-ga-hara of Shinto. Summon Yomotsu-Shikome, the group of black impurities."

Kamijou saw a great wave of black coal tar rapidly approaching.

It was entirely composed of long, black hair belonging to filthy women. Their slender, branch-like arms could be seen sticking through the gaps in the wave.

Kamijou did not know, but this came from the legend of the infinite impurities of the Yomi-no-Kuni and its master Izanami taking human form. This power was the source of all people's death in Japanese mythology.

But not knowing may have been the better option.

One was happier not knowing certain things, just as Izanagi's realization of the truth had opened the furnace of death. In his ignorance, Kamijou was able to slam his fist straight forward.

With the sound of a large amount of human hair being swallowed by a bath drain, the black wave parted down the middle.

However, Marian Slingeneyer may have expected that.

She waited beyond the wave with the gold sword in both hands. She swung it horizontally as if to lop off Kamijou's head.

A high pitched sound rang out as Kamijou's right fist made it in time. Marian's Dáinsleif broke at the base and the blade spun and broke to pieces as it fell.

Everything came to a stop for a moment and Marian spoke quietly from close range.

"She was our hope." Her sticky words oozed out. "We had hopeless dreams and perhaps we should have simply given up, but we were drawn in by the special abilities of Magic God Othinus!! It was because of her that we kept from going mad! It was because of her that we made it this far!!"

Those words reminded Kamijou of a certain mother and child.

The young magician known as Fertility Goddess Freyja had met an unreasonable fate before even being born and she had seen no good will or hope anywhere in the world. To her, Othinus may indeed have been something like a spider web. That child had been willing to do anything to save the mother who had unfairly lost her life.

"She stirred up our hopes and brought us to the ends of the world! And then she ran off on her own!! This is her responsibility. She must pay for what we have become! If it hadn't been for her, we never would have gone down this path!!"

Kamijou felt his heart cool at those shouted words.

Rather than burn in anger, it cooled.

"Are you kidding me?"

In a way, Othinus may indeed have been a negative hope.

It may have been that every monstrous Gremlin member had a situation similar to Freyja's that had made it all inevitable.

But…

"Othinus is an undisputed villain. Without her, none of the chaos after World War III would have happened. But! It was your decision to go along with her!! You made up your own mind and you weighed your own situation against the peace of the world!! You chose to bear that sin, so you don't get to act like a pure and innocent victim. Just because she did horrible things doesn't mean you get to place all your crimes on her too. If we're going to fairly judge her crimes, your crimes have to be judged too!!"

“It doesn’t matter.” Marian gave a desperate laugh while holding the broken sword’s hilt. “As long as I… As long as *we* can get back at her for taking our lives from us, *nothing else matters*.”

In that moment, Kamijou Touma had forgotten one thing.

His right fist’s destruction of Dáinsleif had helped him forget, but Marian had already *swung the sword*.

In that case, she only needed to speak the proper words to send in the fury of an “ending”.

“Cut away Amaravati of Indian mythology. Summon Vishnu Avatara, the ever-changing god!!”

Part 5

An “ending” or “the end of the world” may have held the image of the power of gods or faith waning and an evil one wielding great power. Some may have viewed it as the white and glowing things being blotted out with darkness.

But in some religions, the gods themselves descended to the world and took part in wars.

Shiva, the Indian god of destruction, may have been the most well-known, but there was another god that was just as popular.

Vishnu was the god of preservation.

Brahma, the god of creation, was born from him and he worked to preserve and develop the world that Shiva would destroy. To do this, he used Avatars.

The term “Avatar” may have been best known in its use on the internet, but Vishnu would switch between ten different physical bodies while ending the different wars and calamities on the earth.

Those who worshiped Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva were divided on who the central god was, but they all generally agreed that the three of them formed a trinity that demonstrated its power as the primary god.

In other words, this “ending” did not call in a core of chaos or evil.

It was incomplete and its form was greatly changed, but this beam of light was on the level of a top-ranking god.

Part 6

The final attack was fired.

Technically, Kamijou Touma was unable to see it. In all likelihood, only a highly-advanced Rishi would be able to see it and any inexperienced person who attempted to look would be blinded. Vishnu had always been closely associated with the sun and it went without saying what would happen to anyone presumptuous enough to look at the core of the sun with the naked eye.

However, a scene did appear in the back of Kamijou's mind.

He saw the moment when he had certainly "died".

To ensure she killed him with her crossbow of certain death, Magic God Othinus had sacrificed her own body. She had hidden the attack behind her so that it would pierce through her and her target.

Marian was supposedly attempting to take revenge on Othinus, but instead of focusing on Othinus herself, it seemed she had prioritized making the girl watch someone important to her die.

As long as she could kill Kamijou Touma, it did not matter what happened to her.

And so Kamijou immediately took action.

"Marian!!!!!!"

He pushed down her small brown body and threw himself on top of her just before the brilliant beam of light shot down from overhead. As he was lying on his stomach, the boy could not see what it was, but he felt an intense burning pain stab into his entire back. It felt like a red-hot metal plate was being pressed down on him.

He screamed at the top of his lungs.

The swarm of locusts flying defenseless through the air evaporated. Even the flame-controlling black giant was brought to its knees by the tremendous light.

Kamijou and Marian were tossed into the air.

Her fight had likely ended as soon as this final attack was launched, so she had passed out. Kamijou grabbed at her with both hands in midair.

He ran from the broken sword and over the giant's shoulder, dropped down to its shoulder blade, and made his way down its curled-up back. He slid down like it was an insane water slide from a foreign resort.

Part 7

By Othinus's reckoning, Vishnu Avatara had manifested for less than ten seconds.

Dáinsleif was said to end the world, but it was still a magic sword made to be wielded by human hands. Even if it could create an embodiment of symbols of evil or sin, it could not perfectly and purely summon one of the top-ranked gods of one of the world's four largest religions. There were said to be ten different avatars, but summoning a chaotic and indistinguishable amalgam for a few seconds had been the limit of that sword.

Even so, the level of power had been incredible.

Demon King Surtr slowly collapsed to the side. That giant violently crushed a great amount of snow and conifer trees while disappearing as if dissolving into the air. Kamijou and Marian had been close by before, but she saw them slide off Surtr's back in the distance. They had only survived because Vishnu Avatara had prioritized the greatest evil first. If the manifestation had lasted even a second longer, they too would have been roasted as an element of conflict.

"?"

Suddenly, Othinus realized that the previous figure was nowhere to be seen.

Mjölnir had disappeared.

Part 8

The girl had held no real complaints about her circumstances.

Even with her body as it was, she viewed it as nothing more than the result of optimizing herself.

She had lost her normal body and gained a drum-shaped one.

Those around her may have found it odd for her to remain by Marian Slingeneyer's side when Marian was the one to alter her body like that, but the girl did not view it as anything out of the ordinary. She had given her body to Marian because she was a trusted friend. That was all there was to it.

But the girl had come to a certain realization. As she had listened to her friend and comrade-in-arms Marian Slingeneyer shouting, she had made a fairly meaningless realization.

Oh.

I really am a pitiable girl, aren't I?

In her anger, Marian had shouted, "If it hadn't been for her, we never would have gone down this path." To this girl, her body was nothing more than an extension of her normal, everyday life, but to Marian, it was apparently something she could not allow without some sort of excuse.

Marian had modified living enemy soldiers and returned them to destroy the enemy's morale. She had also showed off her strange taste in human furniture. Those things had likely been the result of planting the idea in her mind that such things were enjoyable. It had likely been a way of letting her look away from some unbearable fact.

And as she had done those things, the line between her true feelings and the façade had vanished and she had truly begun enjoying them.

To the girl, that trivial difference in perception felt like a rift between them.

"Hey."

The black giant had vanished and the boy sat on the snowy plain. Marian Slingeneyer lay next to him and she appeared to be unconscious. Unlike Kamijou, she had been lying on her back in the final moment. Seeing the partial manifestation of Vishnu Avatara up close may have thrown her consciousness into disarray.

"Who were you again?" asked the boy. "You work with Marian, right? Are you going to fight, too?"

The girl shook her drum body. This was equivalent to shaking her head, but she doubted it got through to the boy.

She knocked over her cylindrical body, rolled across the snow, and supported Marian's collapsed form from below. She sprang up by 90 degrees like a clockwork toy and carried Marian on the top of the righted cylinder.

"What are you going to do now?" asked the boy.

The girl did not respond.

He searched through his pockets and used a pen to write a ten digit number on the back of a receipt in his wallet.

It was a cell phone number.

He stuck the scrap of paper in the pocket of Marian's overalls.

"I'm too busy with Othinus right now, but call me if you need something. I'll stand by your side next time."

Again, the girl did not respond.

Just once, her drum-like body tilted forward as if giving a bow and she moved off into the white-covered world while carrying Marian. Behind her, the boy began walking toward his own destination.

Just as Kamijou Touma was standing by Othinus's side even after being killed a million times, the girl would stand by Marian Slingeneyer's side no matter what.

CHAPTER 14

V.S. “The Police of the Front Stage”.

Round_06.

Part 1

Everyone may have forgotten, but Kamijou and Othinus had been walking through the snow to buy a replacement battery from the gas station because the truck they were hitchhiking with had died in the cold.

“This is scary! First there’s that meteorite, then a UFO crashes, and now there was that giant shadow in the distance! Was that some kind of ancient superweapon? Have the mysteries of the world decided to gather in Denmark today!?”

The driver had been on the verge of wetting himself, but he had been unable to escape without a running truck. For better or for worse, that had meant he continued waiting without abandoning the hitchhikers.

At some point, the jam bread from the gas station had ended up in the agitated driver’s stomach. He may have wanted sugar to keep his brain running.

This had angered Othinus enough to grow violent, but Kamijou had successfully restrained her. She was apparently unaware that hitchhikers were at a lower position than the people who picked them up.

Eventually, they arrived in the city of Billund at the center of the peninsula.

The plan had been to find another vehicle there, but that was looking unlikely.

“This isn’t good,” muttered Kamijou. “Everyone around here looks really dangerous. It feels like the special forces in a Hollywood movie. Is this the American military?”

“I’d say it’s the Danish military acting on America’s behalf. They have checkpoints set up on all the major roads, so hitchhiking isn’t gonna be easy.”

“By the way, how much further to the spring your eye is in?”

“We’re a full hundred kilometers to Egeskov Castle. Unless you can run a full marathon, that’s too far for human legs to travel all at once.”

The Japanese were sometimes said to live in rabbit hutches, so travelling 100 kilometers through the snow was much too far removed from Kamijou’s normal experience. Not to mention that he lived in Academy City where everything was crammed together and it was praiseworthy to skip the train and walk when travelling even two or three kilometers from home.

“Staying here won’t do us any good,” said Othinus. “We need to start toward Fredericia. It’s a large city about fifty kilometers east of here. Egeskov Castle is on the island of Funen, and we need to cross the bridge in that city if we’re taking the land route.”

“But that means…”

“I don’t know if they’ve figured out our objective, but this route also leads to the island of Zealand which contains the capital city of Copenhagen. We’ve been sighted on the peninsula, so we should assume they’re blocking off that bridge.”

Kamijou held his head in his hands, but Othinus seemed cheerful.

“The more enemies around, the more we can steal from them. If we swipe a military vehicle, we won’t have to test our luck with hitchhiking anymore.”

“And who’s going to drive that rough thing along the slippery, snowy roads!? Try that like it’s a go-kart and you’ll spin out and crash into a tree not ten minutes into the drive.”

He began seriously considering getting a motorcycle license once he returned to Academy City as he and Othinus left Billund.

For the moment, they were on foot.

They walked through the white world with the extremely vague plan of sneaking aboard the back of a truck if they saw one favoring safety and thus driving slowly along the snowy road.

Needless to say, plans growing vaguer as time went on was a good sign of a coming loss.

Part 2

Kamijou checked his cell phone and found it was currently twelve below zero.

(Why are we trying to walk this distance in such light clothing!? I’m going to lose a finger or an ear!)

Even though he began complaining to himself, that was actually a sign of him calming down a little.

He had smashed a large rock on his right fist, dislocated his shoulder, been hit on the side of the head, fallen from a great height, had a tree branch stab into his thigh, and been caught in a gas station explosion. He was injured all over and travelling by foot, but he had travelled nearly two hundred kilometers from the city of Hjørring on the northern end of the peninsula. He had been complaining about wearing his school uniform in below freezing weather, but he was getting by somehow or other. One hundred kilometers remained which was only half of the distance already travelled. They had already made it through the worst of it. If they only continued on as before, they would reach the goal.

Or so he naively assumed.

They were sighted more often as time went on and thus the accuracy and frequency of interference from the coalition force and Gremlin would increase. A simple 100-meter dash and the 100-meter hurdles required completely different levels of strength. And when the number of hurdles shot up like a quadratic curve, the rest of the path would be nothing like the path so far.

The scene that appeared before their eyes proved that quite well.

They saw tanks.

These perfectly normal weapons were not the cutting edge weapons of the science side or the magic side, but more than fifty of them blocked their path.

“Hey.”

Othinus caught on first. She stopped walking when she saw snow being thrown up into the air as something dug into the ground four or five kilometers ahead.

“This is bad. Get down. The snowscape is filled with American generation 3.5s. They have giant antennae, so they must share a certain level of targeting information via C4I. They don’t seem to have noticed us yet, but if they continue forward while scanning, they’ll pick up on our body heat.”

The sound of the treads digging into the ground was audible even at a distance. It was not that each and every one was loud; there were simply that many of them.

Kamijou nervously crouched down and spoke uneasily.

“American? Is that who our next opponent is?”

“Not necessarily. Denmark imports plenty of American weapons and Academy City took the leadership role during World War III, so there’s a glut of ‘made in USA’ weapons that were brought to Europe. This could easily be the Danish military pulling out some rentals they have yet to return.”

“That really isn’t the main issue.” Kamijou exhaled a white breath and looked at his right hand. “This enemy is made up of pure bullets that don’t use magic or esper powers. In a way, this is the worst enemy to come across!!”

Part 3

At that time, Sergeant Ingrid Martin had already accurately located the two targets. She lay on the snowy plain while wearing a white ghillie suit made by adding powdered paint over conifer tree camouflage, so even the UAVs flying overhead would have a hard time locating her. People viewing the area from a distance with the naked eye would have almost no chance of detecting her.

The large tank unit was a diversion.

A large unit could not be brought in on such short notice, so all the American tanks sitting around after World War III had been lent to the Danish military to stir up the area. Meanwhile, Sergeant Ingrid and the other elites would slowly move alongside the tanks, locate anyone trying to escape them “from a different angle”, and eliminate them.

In truth, it would have been enough to add a papier mache turret on top of construction equipment and paint them up to look military. They only had to frighten the target into movement.

Voices from the others on the same commando unit reached her over the radio.

“This is Lynx. Target located. Securing line of fire.”

“This is Jaguar. Same here. Together with White Lion and Lynx, we have them surrounded from three points.”

“Roger that.” Sergeant Ingrid spoke quietly. “Just out of curiosity, why am I White Lion? There are a lot of better cats you could choose. Y’know, the kinds people make stuffed animals out of.”

“Didn’t you agree to it because lion cubs are fluffy and cute?”

“And even their cubs can bite off a human finger. It’s perfect for you.”

She kept her eyes on the targets, but spotted her comrades from the corners of her eyes and sent deadly thoughts their way. However, not even she could have spotted them without already knowing they were there. The same likely went for them.

Their targets, Kamijou Touma and Othinus, were not even looking in the right direction because they were focused on the tanks. A single pull of the trigger would kill them.

But knowing that produced an annoyed comment from Sergeant Ingrid.

“The leader of the bad guys is one thing, but isn’t the other one the hero who saved Hawaii?”

“This is Lynx. He cancelled that out with what he’s done now.”

“My sister’s husband is from there,” she said. “If we end it like this, I can’t avoid a fight with her. Damn, and I was just starting to get along with my shy niece.”

“This is Jaguar. Everything about us is classified while working across borders. Start talking about your weekend house party and the Company isn’t going to be happy.”

“I’m way more afraid of my sister than those necktie wearing bastards with their thin smiles. As I’m sure you know, she’s the world’s strongest housewife with a grip of 200 kilos and she’s the type to break a safe barehanded if she can’t remember the combination.”

“White Lion, please stop giving out personal information. It defeats the purpose of the codenames.”

“Her family yells at her for her loose tongue, too. She even told the rest of the family who her niece’s first love was, so you can’t expect her to-…”

“Jaguar, you’re not doing much better.”

However, this was not a Hollywood movie, so the soldiers could not let their personal feelings affect the mission.

As they continued their observation, the two targets crouched down to hide themselves. It was far too thoughtless when faced with the sensors of modern weapons, but hiding was hiding. Even if it would accomplish nothing, it indicated their intent to fight. Given the situation, Sergeant Ingrid could only assume the worst.

If they had stood with their hands up, the soldiers would not have had to shoot.

“This is White Lion. Lynx, Jaguar, get set. This job is as depressing as a Monday on your period. Let’s get this over with and go home.”

“This is Lynx. Roger that.”

“This is Jaguar. Roger that. And you actually have girly things like periods?”

After a count of three, Sergeant Ingrid slowly and silently stood up.

She was only two meters behind Kamijou Touma and Othinus.

Part 4

Kamijou did not understand what had happened to him.

He found himself unable to breathe and his vision filled with white like an overexposed photograph. Heat quickly gathered above his neck and he could not move his head well, so he reached for his neck and finally found a dry sensation.

An arm was strangling him from behind.

By the time he determined that, he had already lost feeling in his limbs. Rather than crushing his windpipe and preventing him from breathing, the attacker was placing pressure on his carotid arteries to keep blood from his brain. Before he could even resist, his consciousness slipped into a world of darkness.

“Damn you!!”

Othinus shouted toward the person who wore a white ghillie suit that looked a bit like a yeti costume. The attacker did not hesitate to use the unconscious boy’s body as a shield while keeping their arm around his neck.

The attacker was plenty cautious of Othinus’s power.

Even with no detailed knowledge of magic, the memory of the United States’ army and administration being brought down in Hawaii was still fresh. That was why the attacker had started by attacking Kamijou instead of Othinus.

Her power was unknown, but she was travelling with Kamijou Touma and would thus want to keep the boy with her. That was why he would function as a shield.

With her attention forced onto that fact, Othinus froze in place, but then the snow unnaturally burst up at her feet.

It was a gunshot.

The fact that they were surrounded further dulled Othinus's thoughts.

The attacker decided this was the optimal moment and slipped a hand inside the ghillie suit. That hand came out holding a knife with a blade longer than thirty centimeters.

While using Kamijou Touma's unconscious form as a shield, the attacker did not hesitate to throw that knife toward the center of Othinus's head.

The entire process took only twenty seconds and it ended with a dull noise.

Part 5

"Ugh…"

Kamijou Touma let out a quiet groan.

He could tell he was collapsed somewhere, but he could not tell whether he was on his back or stomach. His mind was so muddled he doubted he could even tell if he had won in a game of rock-paper-scissors.

He heard someone speaking in the distance.

It was fluent English and it was filled with slang not found in textbooks. It might as well have been a completely unknown language to Kamijou.

"You should've just killed her with the knife back there."

"Did you forget the mission objective, chicken head? This Othinus girl might get up again even if we stab her or shoot her."

"We still don't know the details of that 'magic' she used at Hawaii, but she at least needs to think to pull it off. That's why we defeated her while she was *too confused to think*, but now it seems like it was too easy."

He felt no heat.

His consciousness was drawn inwards like he had severe anemia and everything in front of him seemed a long way away.

"And that's why you knocked her out with the knife's grip?"

“We have to wait until the video line to the UN headquarters building is up. She was connected all the way up to the media queen in Hawaii.”

“Having this intercepted could lead to her soldiers interfering, so it isn’t surprising a secure line is taking a while to set up.”

A pair of feet wearing military boots was travelling back and forth in front of him at short intervals.

“Once the line is up, we can move on to mission objective beta. Let’s go back over the process.”

He tried to look up and only then did he realize he was lying face down.

“The reports from Baggage City are hard to believe, but given the possibility of a fake or body double, we will kill Othinus in front of a camera sending the footage to the president in real time. A .45 caliber handgun will be used to reliably destroy her brain and heart. Once her death has been confirmed, three different poisons will be injected into her at twice the lethal dose. Also, her major tendons and nerves will be severed with a knife, the surfaces will be sealed with instant glue, and her body will be flown to Alaska.”

“Don’t forget to take a DNA sample. …And are they seriously going to preserve the corpse? Won’t the remnants of her group view it as a symbol of revival and try to steal it?”

“This is what the higher ups decided, so it isn’t our place to argue. If the body was incinerated, we would have no proof if the remnants began to claim she was still alive. The higher ups are probably afraid of that.”

His hazy mind gradually came into focus.

At the same time, he had a question about this situation he had been accepting as normal.

“Othinus…?”

He finally understood the situation.

“Where’s Othinus!?”

He frantically tried to get up, but a great force pressed down on his back and he heard a metallic noise. He could not see above from his position, but he assumed someone was stepping on his back and aiming a gun at his head.

The pair of military boots in front of him was contacting someone over a radio and that rectangular device was tossed in front of him.

The boots produced a female voice that spoke in Japanese.

“The president has something to tell you.”

“…!”

The pressure on his back remained, so he reached out and grabbed the radio while still on all fours.

A familiar voice came from the device.

“I don’t know why you started this, but didn’t you know this would happen eventually?”

But this cold voice sounded like a completely different person from the man he had worked with in Hawaii.

An individual’s feelings would not get through to this man. Speaking of debts would be meaningless. Growing violent because the man was not listening would accomplish nothing. After all, Roberto Katze was making his decisions with every United States citizen – if not something even greater – weighing on his back. That was a great burden, but it also supported him with a great power.

This was not a one to one conversation.

This clash of wills was at least one to two hundred million and possibly even one to six billion.

Despite that, Kamijou had to win.

He had to invent a reason for that great number of people to hold off on killing Othinus.

“Since you’re even bothering to talk with me, can I assume you’re at least a little hesitant?”

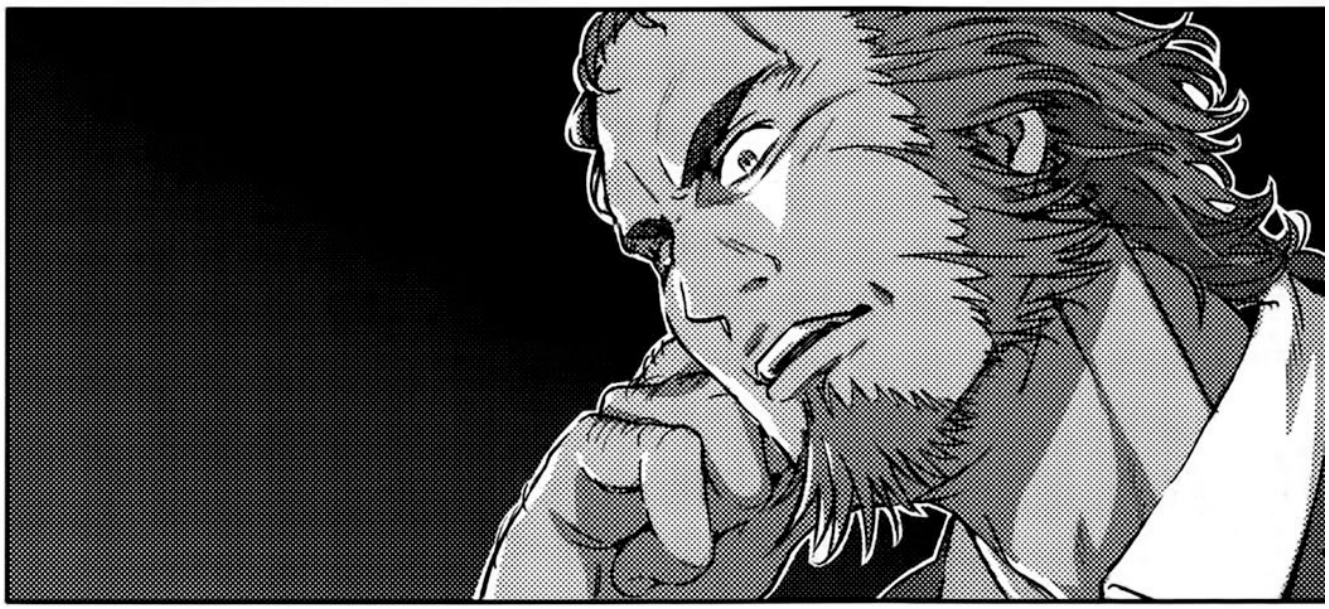
“I’m just killing time while the video line is confirmed secure. We should have about ten minutes left.”

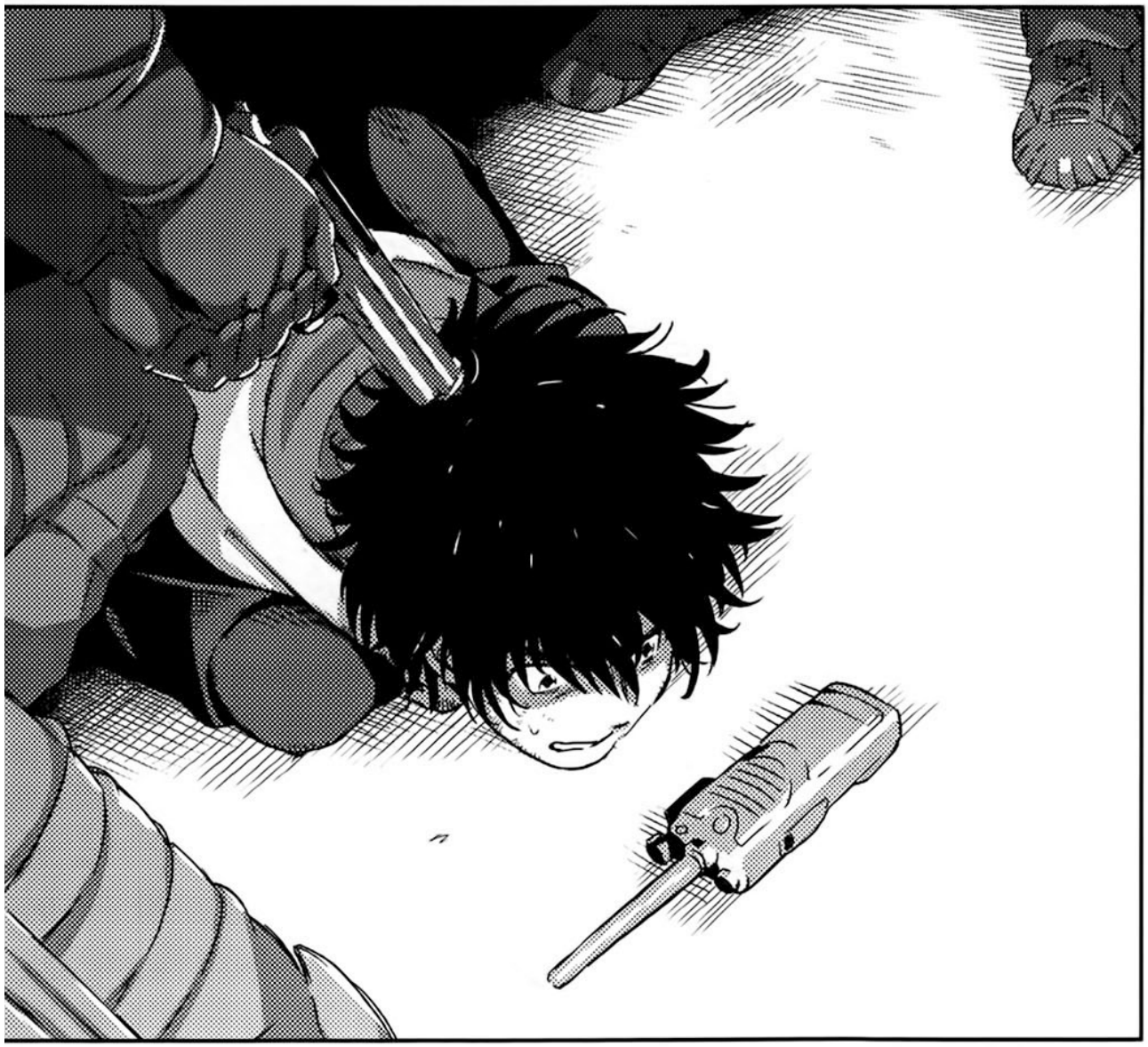
“I won’t let you kill Othinus.”

“You have ten minutes to explain why I shouldn’t, if you can at all. Incidentally, I have enough reasons for killing her that I could make a three-day, three-night speech on it.”

Hearing that coldhearted voice, Kamijou licked his lips.

His opponent was not refusing to talk. Even if that was only to give time for the execution to be prepared, his words could still reach the man.





He could not afford any mistakes here and he felt an unpleasant pain in his heart.

“You still don’t know everything about Othinus. You know she’s fled to Denmark, but you don’t know why. Listen. Wouldn’t it be a bad idea if America eliminated the big boss without knowing her objective or motive?”

“You mean it would damage our reputation as the world police? That doesn’t matter. The definite stability of the world is more important than some formless reputation. You’re out there on the scene, so for better or worse, you probably have a better grasp of what Gremlin is. But the vast majority of the world doesn’t know any of that. Do you have any idea how much damage is being done from rumors, primarily on the internet? If we don’t do anything, it’ll develop into a witch hunt. Rumors that a certain country is supporting Gremlin will gain false credibility and a new war will break out.”

That was the situation in the eyes of America…no, the eyes of the six billion residents of the earth.

They knew nothing of Othinus.

They did not even know if she was male or female.

They were more worried about the threat to their own lifestyles than some unknown person’s life.

“You aren’t wrong,” said Kamijou. “But that’s all the more reason why you can’t kill Othinus.”

“Oh?”

“Killing Othinus won’t make Gremlin peacefully disband. Just because they lose their overall objective of completing the lance, they aren’t going to commit mass suicide. With no one to bring them together, the members will scatter randomly. The loss of their objective will leave them with great anger and their first target will be the peaceful world and America, the country that leads it.”

“We are prepared for the fight to continue. Do we look like a country that will forgive a villain in fear of a distant future?”

“If you think that fight will be hunting down the remnants of the group, you’re dead wrong, Mr. President.” Kamijou’s words stabbed out. “Gremlin has already proven even a superpower like America can be brought to its knees. The world learned that perfectly well at Hawaii. In fact, I’m amazed no one has tried copying them yet. Now, a copycat wouldn’t be that big a problem, but what if the other members of Gremlin gather together? I don’t know a thing about politics, but would I be right in assuming there are a surprising number of people who would like to defeat America?”

“Keeping Othinus around would lead to an age of war just the same.”

“Would it really? If you want to predict where the other members are hiding based on their behavior patterns, you’ll need to learn the secrets of Gremlin from her. And as long as their leader lives, none of the other members can name themselves the new representative. Her survival would at least somewhat hold off their reorganization and regrouping. The slower the enemy is to act, the less chaos will spread through the world and the fewer people will die.”

“But Othinus’s power is unknown. I don’t know what happened with the supposed lance in Tokyo Bay, but she can do something similar or even worse in the future. There’s no good reason to let her go. Even if we close her in a nuclear shelter somewhere, we can’t guarantee Gremlin won’t be able to attack and break her out.”

“Then we just have to take her power from her.”

He finally arrived at their objective.

The question was whether the president would believe him or not.

“We’re trying to permanently remove Othinus’s power and then surrender to you. That unknown power will become a simple zero. That way she can help the world in the future and she won’t be a threat even if she is taken away. That removes any reason to kill her, doesn’t it?”

“Is there really a convenient way of doing that?”

“You all probably don’t understand because it happened so suddenly, but we didn’t come all the way here without an objective in mind. It would have been safer to hide out in some quiet mountain.”

Lying on his stomach put pressure on his lungs, so he had difficulty breathing.

“Listen. We’re not asking you to write off Othinus’s crimes. Once this is over, you can lock her up for decades if you have to. As long as you go through the proper procedure, we won’t stop you. So do you still feel the need to kill her!? All we’re doing is preparing her to be sent to an American prison!”

“I don’t know much about *that side of things*, but isn’t this kind of person usually sent to England or somewhere like that?”

“We’ve already run across the Roman Catholic Church, Russian Orthodox Church, and Anglican Church, but it was no good. They’re all determined to kill. That may be normal to them since they have direct connections to the crusades and witch hunts, but I just can’t get used to methods from 500 or 1000 years ago.”

“…”

“Do you really have to execute her? I’m just a high school student and I don’t know much about law, so I have to ask. In your country and under the rules that act as the global standard, is there really no path left for her except death?”

If the answer was yes, the future would grow pitch black for Kamijou.

Even then, he would not overlook Othinus’s crimes. It would simply make their goal that much more difficult to reach.

“Well…”

There was a pause.

Rather than mocking the boy, the president thought and gave an accurate answer.

“Crimes against humanity are severe. As war crimes, she would be charged with attacking a country without declaring war and indiscriminately attacking civilians. She would certainly be executed. As you know, she attacked Hawaii, Baggage City, and Tokyo…and I’m sure more problems would come to light later. It would be a hard case to win even after paying mountains of money for an army of lawyers.”

Kamijou’s breathing grew erratic, but the president was right. He suppressed his desire to deny it and did his best to accept it.

“On the other hand, Gremlin is not accepted as a nation under international law, nor are they registered as a legitimate military force. Funnily enough, that means some of those war crimes might not apply. It’d be quite a trick to pull it off, though. …But even then, she wouldn’t be innocent. After directly attacking America, the jury would have a terrible impression of her. She’d at least be imprisoned for 100 years. If we successfully sent a manned flight to Mars, found a gene that completely eliminates cancer, formed a peace treaty with the little greys, or otherwise had a national victory, it’s possible she could get a pardon to lessen her sentence, but it would be best to think there’s almost no chance of her ever again coming from behind bars.”

“Heh.”

Hearing that, Kamijou could not help but laugh.

“That’s fine. As long as there’s even the slightest bit of hope, I can accept it. I’ll jump at the chance. We – Othinus and I – will be satisfied with that.”

“Are you sure you understand?”

“It’s a whole lot better than some ridiculous ending where she’s killed in a frenzy, no one feels any guilt over it, and no one questions holding a holiday in the name of her killer. …And I have to apologize. Until now, I’d always thought about the major players being Academy City on the science side and England on the magic side. I’d never thought of

America as being all that important. But you were the most rational ones when it came down to it. You did what the science side and magic side couldn't."

"Is that so?"

That was all Roberto Katze said.

After a pause, he spoke to someone other than Kamijou.

"For our national interests and the stability of the world, Operation Norse Wind is suspended as of now. The commando unit shall release Kamijou Touma and Othinus's bonds and continue their infiltration with the channel open for further orders. Repeat it back to me."

The female soldier who had tossed the radio to Kamijou responded.

"Yes, sir. Operation Norse Wind is suspended as of now. The two targets' bonds shall be released and we shall wait on standby until we receive further orders."

With that, the pressure left Kamijou's back.

He coughed, rolled over on the snow, and looked around. He saw three soldiers in white uniforms and a blonde eyepatch-wearing girl lying a short distance away where the soldiers could keep an eye on her at all times.

"Othinus."

He tried to get up, but pain ran through his hips and he could not manage it. He half-crawled along the snow and approached the unconscious girl.

"Othinus!!"

He did not carelessly grab her shoulders and shake her. He shouted in her ear until he finally heard a groan from her lips. She seemed to have come to.

"We won't attach an obvious collar with a bomb inside or anything," said the voice from the radio. "The United States will be watching over you in hiding and maintaining a position to kill you. That should be enough to replace an actual collar."

Part 6

A heavy silence hung over the conference room in the UN headquarters building.

Time had passed since the president had ended the transmission while showing off.

As the leaders of England, France, Russia, and the Roman Catholic Church stared at him, the large Hispanic man shrank back uncomfortably.

“Sorry,” he said. “It looks like I’m your enemy now.”

Part 7

After confirming that Othinus had come to and that she was not bleeding from the head, Kamijou finally grabbed her shoulders and pulled her from the snow. Her body was surprisingly cold. It was hard to judge from her expression and attitude since she had lost her senses, but her legs and waist were not supporting her properly. He lent her his shoulder and she was finally able to stand up.

Kamijou looked the soldiers in the eye just once.

They paid him no heed and put the yeti-like ghillie suits over their uniforms. That alone messed with Kamijou’s sense of distance and they seemed to blend into the background despite standing right in front of him. It was not simply an issue of camouflage. They cut off their breathing and other things that indicated their presence, so it did not feel like a living creature stood there.

In the blink of an eye, he lost sight of them.

He could tell they had left due to the footprints in the snow, but even that trail would vanish in the blizzard.

“Let’s go, Othinus.”

“Sure.”

Their next destination was Fredericia. To get there, they would have to pass the unit of tanks in front of them. Roberto had said the tanks were a diversion and they were not meant to actually fire. With the entire operation called off, they would have no problem walking right past the tanks.

Or so they thought.

As soon as they took the first step, the group of tanks in front of them was enveloped in a white explosion.

A deluge of sound rushed at Kamijou and Othinus, and they were knocked to the ground.

Something had swept across in a horizontal line.

Kamijou belatedly realized the white explosion had been a great mass of snow being tossed into the air. Of course, it did not end there. The tanks' hatches opened beyond that veil which reached ten meters or higher and the soldiers began to frantically leave the tanks.

The second wave arrived shortly thereafter.

One after another, the sturdy tanks burst from within like balloons. Crimson flames and black smoke scattered everywhere and sometimes the turrets were launched straight up. If all those soldiers had been a little slower to escape, they would have been roasted in giant ovens.

But what had happened?

Lying on the ground, Kamijou moved only his eyes and spotted it.

He was looking high in the white sky.

Another group of weapons seemed to be looking down on the tanks from there.

Their unique silhouettes resembled a praying mantis. In place of the arms, they possessed overly-powerful weapons that gathered railgun barrels like a Gatling gun. As the weapons flew through the air by vibrating their thin wings at high speed, some writing was visible on their bellies.

Five_OVER.

Model_Case_"RAIL_GUN".

"Dammit. They're finally here," groaned Kamijou in fear. "Our next enemy is Academy City!!"

CHAPTER 15

V.S. “The Merciless Scientific Vanguard”.

Round_07.

Part 1

Hamazura Shiage had once fought a certain special weapon to protect Fremea Seivelun.

Its name was Five Over, Modelcase_“RAILGUN”.

The weapon had been built to recreate Academy City’s #3 Level 5’s Railgun with purely industrial technology and to provide more power and accuracy than the original.

When Hamazura had fought it, it had been a type of powered suit and thus required someone to pilot it. It had used high-level electronic control, but it had still required a human brain to control it as a weapon. The machine had been dependent on the human.

But reports had said the same model had not used a pilot when dropped on Baggage City. At that point, it was a completely unmanned weapon. Saying that was simple enough, but that change would have required modifying the very framework of the weapon.

They had completed that in less than a month.

“They” being Academy City, that city that gathered all forms of cutting edge technology.

The research lurking in the depths of that city could overturn people’s expectations in extremely short periods of time, much like bacteria going through mutation after mutation.

Part 2

Kamijou heard an electronic tone followed by a feminine synthesized voice.

“Beginning biometric scan for Othinus and Kamijou Touma. Any interfering elements shall be physically eliminated. All noncombatants, please display your intent to disarm immediately.”

Kamijou initially assumed the voice came from the weapons flying in the air, but it did not. The source of the noise was much lower. It was coming from the surface in the distance.

“That’s coming from the warning speakers on those tanks. Are they being hacked?”

“If you do not display intent to disarm, you shall be eliminated regardless of the reason. To repeat, beginning biometric scan for…”

There were around 150 Five Overs stopped in the white sky. Approximately half of them were descending to the surface.

The soldiers who had fled from the burning tanks could be seen raising their hands, lying on the ground, and placing their hands on the back of their heads. The composite material praying mantises passed right by them. The tanks may have been getting in the way of the scan because one of those 70 ton masses of steel would occasionally be blown away like an empty box of chocolates.

As Kamijou stared blankly at the sight, he felt a powerful grip on his shoulder.

It was the American soldiers who had vanished into the landscape with their white ghillie suits.

“Hey! I thought you talked this out with the president. Why is Academy City attacking the tanks!?”

The female soldier was shouting wide-eyed into his ear, so he shouted back.

“Do they *look* like they’re on my side!? I may live in Academy City, but I’m just a high school student!”

“Quit complaining and think rationally,” said Othinus. “If that ridiculous warning is accurate, their targets are the boy and me. As long as you disarm, they won’t eliminate you. Can you do that?”

“We’re forbidden to be taken prisoner no matter the circumstances or situation. If we’re captured, we die. We have a bullet in our breast pocket to act as a ‘protective charm’ against capture.”

“Then we should work together. He’ll give you information on Academy City, so you tell us how to survive this.”

Othinus received a loud click of the tongue in response.

After the others started staring at him, Kamijou gave a flustered response.

“I’ve ridden on them a few times, but Academy City’s supersonic planes can carry materiel and personnel around the world at 7000 kph. They can send this kind of firepower to the opposite side of the globe in only a few hours. They used them to fill the skies with parachutes during World War III and Baggage City.”

“Sounds like something that would infuriate the Company. What about those praying mantises?”

“I saw a few of their remains lying around in Baggage City before they were retrieved. They say Five Over on them and, as hard as it is to believe, each individual one has the power of a railgun and it can fire them like a Gatling gun. Their attacks are as or more powerful than the #3’s famous attack and they can fire thousands of them every minute, so they might be able to slice an Aegis ship in two.”

The Ghillie suit soldiers looked up toward the heavens as they heard that explanation that sounded like it was written in crayon next to a child’s drawing of a superweapon. That ridiculous sounding threat ridiculously blocked the sky from view and they could only curse god in their hearts.

“Why is Academy City actively attacking our troops? Their internal affairs are disturbingly unclear, but they want to defeat Othinus just like us, don’t they?”

“But did Academy City take part in the international coalition? It seemed to me they were acting on their own during the battle in Tokyo Bay.”

Even so, not even Kamijou could tell what Academy City was doing.

Rather than executing Othinus, were they going to capture her like they had Fräulein Kreutune? Or had they simply not trusted all the other world powers to have what it took to kill Othinus?

In that infinite hell, Kamijou had seen a world where Academy City had been defeated and its people were starving.

That may have been a convenient scenario crated by Othinus, but it was relatively accurate that the city could not sustain itself on its own as far as food and resources were concerned.

What was Academy City trying to do while risking that hopeless future?

“Something else caught my attention,” added Othinus. “I don’t know how well these Five Overs’ scans works, but why are they scanning this area specifically? If they had located us by satellite, they would have ignored the tanks and come right here.”

“Hm? I thought they were scanning all over the place because they didn’t know where we are.”

“If they didn’t know where we are, they wouldn’t have narrowed it down to this plain. They have some general information telling them we’re in this area, but they don’t have our exact coordinates. That vague information had to have come from somewhere.”

One of the yeti-like ghillie suits shook unnaturally.

It looked like the awkward behavior of a local mascot after some kind of project failed.

“Don’t tell me the American military’s transmissions were intercepted. It’s true that we hide our location from the operation leaders and president to increase our level of secrecy. The diversion unit doesn’t know we’re here at all.”

Othinus snapped her fingers, made a handgun gesture with her thumb and index finger, and pointed it at the ghillie suit.

“You owe us one now.”

“What!? None of this would have happened if it wasn’t for you, terrorist!!”

Kamijou tried to calm down the two and they both grabbed his collar. Life was tough for the sensible jack of all trades.

“A-anyway, this means the Five Overs know to check this area but don’t have our location yet. We’ll be fine if we escape now. We might be able to avoid having our bodies turned to sponges by a downpour of steel.”

After summing up the situation, the fighting finally settled down.

“Arguing isn’t going to help,” said the ghillie suit. “Let’s get out of here and do whatever we can.”

Their enemies this time were completely unmanned weapons.

Personal emotions and discussions of the overall pros and cons would not work here.

Part 3

With the yeti-like ghillie suit soldiers in the lead, Kamijou travelled across the snowscape while lending a shoulder to Othinus. They were moving away from their destination, but escaping the 150 Five Overs came first.

“This ain’t good. Once those things start firing, we’re fucked.”

One of the large yetis spoke, but Kamijou could not understand English filled with that much slang.

“Did you know that Denmark is only 150 meters above sea level? The whole place is flat as a board. There’s nothing we can use for cover.”

“Jaguar, I doubt anyone can understand you without living in a rundown Brooklyn apartment for half a year. For some reason, the Japanese are satisfied with their insane English education, so it’s a bit much to expect him to understand.”

“Rumble rumble rumble. And who was it that just said ‘flat as a board’? Rumble rumble rumble.”

“You’re not supposed to say ‘rumble rumble’ out loud, you hypersensitive flat-chested woman! I understand you’ve been reading a bunch of comics to have something to talk about with your niece, but still!!”

“‘Flat-chested’? I see someone has a death wish. You’re gonna see hell on the plane ride back home.”

The ghillie suit yetis were whispering back and forth. Kamijou turned toward Othinus, but she only gave an exasperated sigh. It seemed she had no intention of translating.

The snowy plain continued as far as the eye could see and the ghillie suits were trying to get as far away as possible while hiding inside the conifer forest.

Kamijou and Othinus followed them into the forest.

The Five Overs’ synthesized voice was still coming from the warning speakers on the hacked tanks.

“Beginning biometric scan.”

As soon as they started holding their breath, the conifer trees were mowed down with tremendous force.

Rather than a sequence of individual noises, a single great whirl of noise assaulted their eardrums. The instant they got down on the ground in surprise, trees thicker than Kamijou's waist were sliced through like a lawnmower cutting through weeds. Sharp fragments much like a pencil broken in half rained down. Kamijou lay over Othinus to protect her and scorching pain stabbed into his back.

He grimaced and shouted over the din.

"They've already found us!!"

"But we can't stop here! Jaguar, don't fight back. There's no point!!"

Frightened by the explosive noises and almost crushed by his fear, Kamijou pulled up Othinus and pursued the ghillie suits' backs while staying low. All the while, the horizontal torrent of steel continued.

After a while, the female soldier realized something.

"Wait. None of the shots are hitting us. Are these supposed to be warning shots?"

"They have too much power," answered Kamijou while crouching and supporting Othinus. "The #3's railgun bullets melt after about fifty meters, but they're firing from kilometers away here. When too far away, the air resistance may melt the surface of the bullets and alter their trajectory. Otherwise we'd have been torn to pieces long ago."

"In other words, we're safe for the moment?"

"Not necessarily. They'll have analyzed the situation too. See, they're approaching all at once!!"

Some tore up the snow on the ground and some vibrated their giant wings to fly through the white sky, but they all moved closer. It looked exactly like the advance of an army of giant insects from an old disaster movie. Kamijou felt a much more primal and raw fear than simply being pursued by accurate unmanned weapons.

They ran with all their might, but they were on foot. They could never play a proper game of tag with the Five Overs that functioned in place of tanks and attack helicopters.

And once those weapons arrived close enough, they would truly be torn to pieces.

Kamijou ran while lending Othinus his shoulder and he called out to the ghillie suits leading the way.

"You all need to surrender! There's no point in sticking with us any longer!!"

“If we could, we already would have. Do you know why we’re called commandos and not rangers? It’s because we aren’t assigned official ID numbers. We work across borders year round, so we can’t be taken prisoner! It’d be a bigger scandal than a CIA member defecting!!”

“They aren’t taking prisoners. If you put your hands up, they’ll pass right by you. This is your chance to give up your pride and survive. They silenced fifty tanks in a matter of minutes. You have to know how much of a threat that is a lot better than an amateur like me!”

The distance shrank.

The clanking sounds of the insects’ squirming legs gradually approached.

The ghillie suits seemed indecisive for a moment, but after a loud click of the tongue, they stopped and raised their hands. Kamijou passed by them and did not have time to turn around.

“You abandon me too!” shouted Othinus while supporting herself with his shoulder. “You’re only of interest because you sided with me, so you’ll go back to being a normal person if you turn me in!!”

“Don’t be ridiculous. You heard that warning. I’ve already been deemed a target. We’re in the same position now, so I can no longer turn back!!”

Othinus viewed Kamijou from the side as he shouted in desperation and she saw something unbelievable there.

The deep snow was grabbing at his feet, he was trembling from the cold and his own fear, he was supporting the extra weight of Othinus, and he was fleeing with no concern for appearances.

But Kamijou Touma was smiling.

“Let’s find a way to get out of here, no matter what it takes!”

“And what then? Even if we somehow do manage to escape, an even more brutal enemy will arrive next. That will continue on and on. Surely you’ve asked yourself what happens once we really do escape it all!”

“That’s not my question to answer!! It’s your life, so you get to decide!!”

His teeth were chattering as he shouted out.

“You’ll retrieve your eye from that spring, cast aside all your power, surrender with your hands in the air, and make up for all your crimes with a long prison sentence. And after that’s over, it’s your life! That means you get to decide. You can start a bakery or a flower shop or whatever else!! Once it’s all over, there’s no reason for anything to be taken from you in the name of the world or peace!!”

As he spoke, he looked at the girl known as a magic god.

Her cheeks had relaxed ever so slightly.

And even then, the countless deadly weapons approached from behind.

They were reaching the range where they could reliably kill with mechanical accuracy.

Part 4

Visual identification, gait identification, bioelectric scan, and 47 other identification scans complete. Combined probabilities of 87% and 98%. Identities confirmed.

Self-analysis of Gatling railguns complete. When firing normal bullets with a wind speed of 7 meters and a temperature of -12 degrees, an unallowable error occurs at greater than 1000 meters. Electronic calculations and actual test firing have produced identical results. Altering spec sheet and sharing via network.

Distance to targets: 1208 meters.

Time until altered absolute kill range: 10 seconds.

“Whoops… Now, let’s see. Have I hacked into the system yet?”

Illegal packet format detected.

Infiltration route scan…failed. Subsystem activation…failed. Shared network purge…failed. General threat assessments: 0. The system is free of erorrrrrr

? ???

Kssssssssssssssssshhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!

“Okay, time to let that idiot have it!!”

Part 5

The group of Five Overs swarmed Kamijou and Othinus all at once.

Some came from the white sky and others tore into the group behind them. Anything within range, from a human to an air-to-surface missile travelling at Mach 4, could be shot down with a high level of accuracy. The two of them were targeted with the great "arms" that were the Gatling railgun barrels used to tear their prey to pieces.

In that moment, one Five Over in the air lost its balance. After that, all of the advanced weapons filling the sky began to crash, one after another. Some even collided with the models on the ground.

"Shit! What is going on!?"

Kamijou crouched down while holding Othinus. As he did, the danger pouring down like a meteor shower tore up the surrounding snow and dirt and he heard several explosions.

Finally, the disturbance settled down.

"What happened?"

Despite surrounding them from only five meters away, the Five Over barrels did not spew their steel downpour. In fact, the weapons were completely motionless.

However, there was a clear order to it all.

The insects covering the snowy plain all had their heads tilted as if focusing on one fellow machine in particular.

From overhead, their formation may have looked like a strange giant flower.

Kamijou heard a hard clank as someone stepped up on the head of the "queen" receiving all the others' focus.

"What?"

The short girl had short brown hair and she wore an expensive-looking duffle coat over a Tokiwadai Middle School uniform.

More importantly, this was the Level 5 the Five Overs were based on.

"Misaka!?"

"Just to be clear, I'm not about to join your side for no reason. I'm not that convenient a girl."

She spoke indifferently and spread her arms to indicate the army she had made her own.

“I’ve hacked all of this firepower. If you don’t want to die here, then defeat me and continue on.”

“…”

Kamijou lowered Othinus to the snowy ground and clenched his right fist once more.

As he prepared to confront the #3 Level 5 while surrounded by 150 Five Overs, he asked a quiet question.

“…Are you mad?”

“Yes, quite a bit! When did you become a spy for Gremlin!?”

CHAPTER 16

V.S. “The Heaven-Sent Child Loved by Electrons”.

Round_08.

Part 1

There was no definite chance of victory.

Normally thinking, Misaka Mikoto was using excessive force. All she had to do was snap her fingers and Kamijou and Othinus would be torn to pieces and destroyed to the point of being a mushy soup.

That meant Kamijou’s only chance was to make a gamble.

For the boy who constantly bore the weight of misfortune, this was an extreme longshot.

He dashed over to the closest Five Over and slammed his palm against it.

Misaka Mikoto had said she acquired this firepower by *hacking them*.

If she had used her ability to control electricity for that hacking, a touch from Kamijou’s right hand would release them from their queen’s control.

He would leave the rest up to the machine.

Would they prioritize killing Othinus and Kamijou Touma as before?

Or would they prioritize eliminating Misaka Mikoto who had hacked into the military network?

“Ah! Wait!!”

Mikoto frantically spoke up, but the Five Over aimed its giant arm toward her. Seeing the bundle of railgun barrels begin to rotate, she paled and used powerful magnetism to levitate a different nearby unit as a shield.

Piece after piece of the shield was torn through with a deafening noise.

“Give it…”

All the trees in the area had been felled, but a sound akin to rustling leaves could be heard.

It came from a large clump of iron sand vibrating as it rose from the ground.

“…a rest alreadyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyyy!!”

As the iron sand sword rose like a whip, it severed the two arms of the Five Over that had gone out of control (or regained control?). The machine tried to tackle her, so the sword went on to chop off its head. Mikoto gasped for breath and tossed the shield aside.

“Honestly, why are you making a girl…”

She trailed off when she saw what Kamijou had done during the time she spent dealing with the one Five Over.

He was running around pressing his palm against machine after machine.

To preserve their system, each and every one of them attempted to physically eliminate the source of the cyber attack.

“…do this kind of thiiiiiiiiiinnnnnnnnnnnnggggggggggggg!?”

From there, it developed into a war between Five Overs.

Mikoto remotely controlled the 150 machines spread out across the snowy plain while Kamijou could only secure the machines he could physically touch with his hand. As far as total numbers went, Mikoto had an overwhelming advantage.

However, that turned out to be a problem.

Yes.

Mikoto had no way of distinguishing enemy from ally.

Needless to say, even Mikoto would be blown to pieces if she was hit by a railgun. In order to prevent unexpected attacks from a blind spot and to secure her safety, she chose to destroy every machine she had reason to suspect.

As a result, she destroyed more machines than necessary and began wearing down her own numbers.

(I'm still going to push onwards! Of course I am!! I have an overwhelming advantage in numbers and I can corner him from multiple angles using a mixture of my own powers and these pieces of junk. There's no way he can overcome this with nothing but a special right hand!!)

After seeing the out of (Mikoto's) control Five Overs dropping in number, the #3 became certain of her victory once more.

But then she made yet another mistake.

She had grown so focused on the atmosphere of strategic simulation parameters that she had forgotten that the number of Five Overs did not really matter.

This was a fight between Misaka Mikoto and Kamijou Touma.

(Wait a minute. Where'd that idiot get off to!?)

She sent out orders to the Five Overs and used all their sensors to scan the area.

She received a result quite quickly: directly behind her.

The target, Kamijou Touma, had circled behind and climbed onto the same Five Over as her.

"Hey, Misaka." The boy smiled as he tightly clenched his right fist. "If possible, I'd rather not use this on you. Are you still gonna make me?"

The railguns of the Five Overs were powerful, but being Gatling guns, they exchanged accuracy for the ability to fire a massive amount of bullets. They could be used to "hit the target somewhere on the body and kill them from the shock", but they could not be used to shoot off the head of a match like a sharpshooter. And the concept behind the Five Overs was to outdo the original Level 5, so there was a danger of a stray bullet piercing through even Mikoto's greatest defenses.

In short, the safest place was right next to her.

Even when surrounded by over 100 Gatling railguns, ordering them all to attack would blow away Mikoto along with him.

She was rational enough to understand that premise.

And so she gathered a large quantity of iron sand around her.

Each individual one was not much different from her iron sand swords, but these were not held in the hand and there were more of them. Her anger seemed to take physical form as many black whips writhed about her.

“Heh…heh heh. Did you think you were safer fighting me than those pieces of junk? Did you think you’d have an easier time of it? I see, I see.”

“When did you start using tentacles!?”

“Will you never get tired of mocking me!? I’m going to settle this once and for all. I don’t know what happened with you, but I’m going to beat the rotten roots of it right out of you!!”

The back of the deactivated Five Over supplied less than ten meters of footing and Misaka Mikoto used her eight whips to clash with Kamijou Touma and his single fist.

Part 2

In truth, Kamijou felt the iron sand sword was the most frightening of Misaka Mikoto’s repertoire of attacks.

The lightning spear and railgun travelled in a straight line and did not turn once they had been fired. Their overwhelming speed and destruction were a threat, but they could be handled by throwing off her timing or causing her to fire on the wrong trajectory.

On the other hand, the iron sand swords moved about like a living creature. Kamijou could only negate them with his right hand, so a blade that could complexly alter its trajectory like a living snake was a symbol of fear to him. If he tried to grab at an obvious attack, it was possible he could be pulled forward and have his hand cut off.

And now there were eight of them.

Rather than an octopus or squid, this felt more like extremely long spider legs. A black sphere of iron sand floated behind her back and the whips shot out from there, passed over her shoulder or under her arm, and attacked him.

They wriggled as if alive and attacked simultaneously from eight directions at once.

He could not handle that with a single right hand, so he would simply be tormented to death.

However…

As soon as he grabbed one of the whips flying toward him, all eight of them fell to pieces.

“……Huh?”

She was defenseless. Stripped bare.

Her thoughts ground to a halt and he turned a dull look toward her.

“Well, all eight of them were connected to the sphere behind you. Whenever I touched your iron sand sword, it would vanish from tip to base, so I guess the destruction transferred to all eight of them with just one touch.”

“Huh!!!???”

“What is this nice feeling? I was risking my life with all those legitimate threats, so this is a nice change of pace. It’s so relaxing.”

“Stop! Don’t put me in the comedy battle category!!”

“Y’know what, Misaka? You feel a lot like a hot spring in a snowy mountain or an oden stand during winter.”

“Don’t treat me like some old woman!! You’re older than me!!”

Bluish-white sparks flew from her bangs.

Kamijou prepared himself for a lightning spear, but something else happened.

The Five Over underneath them suddenly rotated as if a skewer from the front had stabbed into it and rotated. Kamijou was thrown onto the snow and Mikoto jumped toward him from close range.

“You! I thought we were working together to destroy Gremlin and their base in Sargasso! Weren’t we stopping that Othinus person from creating some lance!? And when did you start getting along with that blonde girl in the eyepatch!? Well!!?”

“Not go- bh!? Not good!! I can’t do anything about normal fists that don’t use- bgh!? Bweh. I have my reasons!!”

Kamijou somehow managed to swing his head away from Mikoto’s fist. As she tried to climb on top of him, he rose up and rolled along the snow with her.

She used her clenched fists and sometimes her elbows and forehead to strike his face.

“What happened to defeating Othinus!?”

“We don’t need to! We don’t need to do that anymore!!”

“Why not!?”

“Um… I’m not sure where to start, but the world was destroyed!!”

“And what does that nonsense have to do with you and Othinus being together!?”

“This isn’t just about her anymore!!”

She refused to get off of him, so he folded his right leg until the knee reached his chest and placed the bottom of the foot against her stomach. As if releasing a spring, he launched her away from him.

The two of them stood up on the snow and a short silence fell.

It was Mikoto who whispered a question amid the many weapons.

“What do you mean?”

“There was a really long time between when we arrived on Sargasso and when the attack on Othinus began, but everyone else didn’t notice.” Kamijou’s voice was shaking. “I know this is really hard to believe, but it’s the truth!!”

He doubted this would get through to her. He was more tormenting himself than anything.

“And during that time… Oh, dammit. I thought I’d gotten over this, but I just can’t make up my mind. At any rate, a lot happened. So very much happened. …For example, would you believe this? I saw all 20,000 Sisters alive and attending a festival together. You didn’t have to suffer at all and all of you were smiling together as friends. That era really happened. And this wasn’t an illusion or suggestion and it wasn’t a parallel world or dream. *This world* truly did have that happy era!!”

Mikoto only looked dubious.

It was not that she was forgiving him. It did not feel real to her. That was why she did not get angry. It was horribly unfair of him to assume that meant she had accepted his actions.

So…

“I destroyed all those people’s happiness to come back here. It wasn’t just you. To come back here, I rejected a world where all 6 billion people were perfectly saved!”

“I don’t have the slightest clue what you’re talking about.”

"*The very fact that you don't* shows that I've trampled on your dignity!!"

Mikoto had tried to let it slide with a vague smile, so he shouted out to grab her attention and spoke clearly.

"I'll try to understand. I'll work to understand what exactly you gained and what you lost!! But I need Othinus for that. No, if you learn the truth and remember that happy era, you might stop hating Othinus. And then you could easily turn that hatred toward me. You may not understand, but you shouldn't make up your mind and forgive me until you do!!"

"You…?"

"Of course, I don't want to destroy myself anymore. I know all too well that I'm not some chosen hero. If…If it's at all possible that we can all live happily together in this world, then I want to. But that's exactly why I have to settle everything and pay for all my sins. And her testimony is needed for that! I can't avoid the issue by letting her die here and be hidden from public view!! I can't return to a peaceful city after that!! I have so much I have to pay for!! I may even have done more than Othinus!!"

Naturally, Misaka Mikoto did not understand the true feelings behind Kamijou Touma's cries.

Without sharing the same time as him, that was unavoidable.

"There was a world where all 20,000 Sisters were saved and everyone could smile without grief?"

Mikoto had a certain thought as she grasped a fragment of what had spilled from Kamijou's mouth.

"After everything, why would you cling to a convenient and terribly naïve world like that!!!?"

Part 3

If all six billion people could smile, that would certainly be best for the world.

No option could be better and that should be prioritized above all else.

Ultimately, Kamijou had overcome that "ultimate argument" with his personal hopes and desires, but he had yet to bring himself to directly defeat that "ultimate argument".

If he had to choose right or wrong, the answer Othinus had shown him was definitely "right".

He had wanted to reject that answer even if it meant bearing the sin of being "wrong".

That had been the truth.

Or it should have been.

"Do you really think that's the same thing as saving people?"

Misaka Mikoto walked straight toward him through the snow.

A different sort of anger was clearly visible in her eyes.

"There's no set definition of happiness. As soon as you unify everything under a single set of values, the next round of misfortune and discrimination has already begun."

An explosive noise burst out as Misaka Mikoto's fist struck Kamijou Touma at close range.

Bluish-white sparks flew from her arm as she spoke.

"I don't know what happened to you. I can't even imagine it. You've probably seen a deeper part of the world than I have while staying in Academy City."

Her legs moved and he jumped back, fearing having his legs swept out from under him.

"But that doesn't mean you're right 100% of the time. No one has to accept what you say."

He could not relax just by gaining some distance between them, so he immediately crouched down and thrust his fist toward the pure-white snow.

Bluish-white sparks burst from her feet in every direction and Imagine Breaker just barely negated the high-voltage current even more intense than a train track's overhead wires.

"Even if a big bang happened right this instant, the world and universe were remade from scratch, people lived there with no crimes, sins, or mistakes whatsoever, and someone named Misaka Mikoto ignorantly smiled there...!!"

Centered on her clenched fist, a tremendous amount of sparks burst from her entire body.

"That doesn't change the fact that I took more than 10,000 lives in the past! Even if everything and everyone is saved a second from now and all the documents are rewritten, I don't want to run from my sins!!"

For an instant – just an instant – Kamijou Touma's thoughts came to a stop.

And that was when the second wave arrived.

A high-voltage current expanded along the surface of the snowscape and attacked his feet that were buried in the snow.

"Gah!?"

"There's no such thing as a perfect world."

He felt a pressure around his heart and his footing grew unsteady, but Mikoto grabbed his collar to support him when he started to fall.

"Even if it looks perfect on the surface, you'll find something twisted if you look at it differently. It was the same with the #1's experiment. You wouldn't accept it when I said my way would make everyone happy! If you understood it back then, why did you change your mind now!?"

After a sound like a swinging metal baseball bat, her forehead slammed into his.

(Not good.)

But it was too late.

A lightning spear of a billion volts produced a tremendous noise as it stabbed into Kamijou's head from point blank range.

"Vwah!? Agwah!!"

As he lay in the snow, his limbs trembled and he could not get up properly. His heart, brain, and nerves all cried out in pain.

"Those six billion people were swallowed up!! That was a world where a single set of values was forced on them all and they were only allowed to smile!! Anyone who doesn't smile is treated like they don't belong!! If you see something like that, you aren't supposed to sit there looking jealous!! No matter how painful and hard it is and even if you're all alone, isn't it your role to clench your fist and say it's wrong!?"

Misaka Mikoto did not hold back.

She climbed on top of the collapsed boy's stomach, grabbed his collar with both hands, violently shook his head, and shouted at close range.

“You came back to this world? You sacrificed everyone else to do so? If so, you aren’t supposed to envy what you turned your back on!! You’re supposed to be glad you returned to this world! Even if it’s imperfect and incomplete, you should be glad you were born into this world!! You should be proud of that fact!!”

As if twisting his neck, he desperately looked up at her face.

“Of course…I’m going to change my mind,” he spat out. “You were smiling. You may not remember, but in that golden world, you were truly happy and smiling!! When I see that, I’ll attack my previous thoughts and admit I was wrong!! I’m not some stuffed animal on a conveyer belt!! If I know continuing on will drop me off a cliff, I’ll readily change my beliefs or ideals!!”

A great sound burst out as Misaka Mikoto swung down her fist.

Something split within his mouth, his cheek felt oddly hot, his right eyelid was swollen, but he continued shouting and ignored the fist as it swung down again and again.

“I’m just a high school student! I’m not the 47 Ronin from the Chushingura!! I’ll change what I say any number of times based on what I think is best at the time!! Even if I said something different three days ago and even if I’m saying the exact opposite, it’s still a win as long as someone is smiling in the very end!!”

Hearing that, Mikoto gave a thin smile and stopped her fist.

“Oh, so you do understand.”

“…?”

“There’s no reason to fall off the cliff while bound by meaningless principles and ideologies. If you’re reaching for the happiness you alone believe in, it’s fine to choose the best arguments for the situation. It doesn’t matter if you have to spit on your own words, as long as it all works out in the end.”

Mikoto looked Kamijou Touma directly in the eye.

“So there’s nothing saying you *have to* bear the weight of my future or the fate of six billion people to the point of your own destruction.”

She spoke and smiled while sitting on top of him in the snow.

She reached her arms around to his back in a gentle embrace.

And a moment later, a tremendous high-voltage current burst from her body and his consciousness was finally blown away.

Just before everything fell to darkness, he thought he heard her speak.

“This is the first time I’ve beaten you… It’s a lot emptier than I thought it would be.”

Part 4

The world flickered before Kamijou’s eyes.

He grimaced as a pain stabbed from the back of his eyes and directly to his brain and his mind quickly came into focus. He was still lying in the snow, but he could not feel the cold. Only after coughing and somehow managing to sit up did he realize Misaka Mikoto was quietly sitting right next to him.

“*Are you awake now?*”

“Yeah,” he groaned.

In that infinite hell, the Will of the Sisters had saved him by saying he could pursue his own selfishness over the ideal of saving the world.

And now he had been taught that humans were not so simple that saving the world and recreating it into a convenient form was enough to make everyone unconditionally happy.

He began to wonder what he had been doing all this time and he slowly stood up amid the snow.

“Sorry, Misaka. I’ll be going.”

“Because you have to?”

“No.” He wiped the snow off of his back and hips. “Because I want to.”

Hearing that, Mikoto gave a small shrug and showed a different smile from before.

“Then how about you get going?”

“What, you aren’t going to stop me?”

“I can’t. I may have easily beaten you ten minutes ago, but I doubt I could beat you now no matter what I did.”

He turned his back on Mikoto and walked off into that white world once more.

He did not turn around, but he waved a hand in parting. She watched him leave for a while but finally let out a white sigh.

There was a simple reason why she had not said she was going with him.

“Now, then.”

She stood up and walked in the opposite direction of him.

She heard a grinding noise. She had used Academy City’s #3 Level 5 ability to hack in from the outside, but all the Five Overs were gradually breaking free of those electronic chains.

This was a modern battle.

The girl gave a ferocious smile while facing the weapons sent to reliably destroy a certain boy.

“I think it’s about time to do my part.”

CHAPTER 17

V.S. “The Master of the Library and the Magic Queen”.

Round_09.

Part 1

Kamijou Touma and Othinus made their way to the city of Fredericia.

However, that was a fifty kilometer trek east from the battle with Mikoto and they could not walk that far in -12 degree weather after so many battles. They could not hope to hitchhike either, so what were they to do?

Continuous metallic noises gave the answer.

Othinus’s upper body was sticking up above the turret.

“I never thought we would end up driving an American tank.”

“This is seriously scaring me!! Is this thing really going straight? I’ve never driven anything more than a bicycle! You can’t make a high school boy who’d be nervous on a unicycle drive something like this!!”

To put it simply, they had borrowed one of the tanks used for the diversion.

“In this, it doesn’t matter if you slip on the snowy road or run into a tree,” said Othinus with a hand on her headset. “Unless we reach a populated area, it doesn’t matter how far off course you end up.”

“I get that, but still!!”

The latest tanks supposedly used a steering wheel, but this may have been a downgraded version because it used the old levers. Just like excavators, bulldozers, and other construction equipment, the right and left treads were operated with separate levers which handled forward, reverse, and turns. Stopping the right tread and moving the left would turn right, the reverse would turn left, and moving both would take them forward.

“You have to admit, it’s nice to have air conditioning,” commented Othinus. “My sense of heat is almost gone, but I can feel my skin softening up.”

“Eh? Are you sure this isn’t all exhaust?”

“And this canned meat is pretty good. It tastes like a mix between Salisbury steak and a meatball.”

“No matter what I eat, it all tastes like smoke!”

Kamijou had assumed taking a tank for a drive would quickly get a squad of police sent in, but other than photos taken by cars passing by, it went peacefully. All sorts of weapons were gathered around Denmark and tanks may have been a rare sight in modern times. This gave Kamijou and Othinus a chance, but it also frightened him.

And before long, he could no longer worry about those bigger issues.

A major problem presented itself much more close to home.

“Hey, this is probably a good place to stop,” said Othinus. “The ocean’s right over there. Keep going and we’ll fall in.”

“Huh? How much further? Here?”

The entire tank lurched, but the mass of metal did not stop moving.

Othinus grabbed her headset and shouted in annoyance.

“That was the shift lever!! Hurry up and bring the tread levers to neutral! Both of them!!”

“Which are those again!? Which levers!?”

“Fine, just put that shift lever in neutral! That’ll stop it too!!”

“Ahh, I think it’s too late. This thing’s going into the ocean!!”

Othinus jumped from the cupola on top of the turret and Kamijou opened the round front hatch and rolled out into the snow.

A moment later, the 70 ton machine dropped into the cold ocean like someone getting too aggressive in a game of chicken.

Othinus strangled Kamijou with both hands and shook him back and forth.

“Why! Are! You! So! Useless!!?”

“I told you a tank was too much for someone who can’t even roller skate! And wait. How much does a tank cost? There was that blown up gas station and destroyed British mobile fortress too, so how much am I going to owe once this is all over?”

Incidentally, when sold to a foreign country, a generation 3.5 tank would cost about a billion yen.

The world’s most luxurious vehicle was not a black German car or a red Italian car.

“Anyway, the city’s over there,” said Othinus while pointing with her thumb. “Let’s get over to the bridge there and cross to Funen.”

The city of Fredericia was large.

They looked around cautiously while walking through the major streets, but they did not see any military vehicles setting up checkpoints.

“What’s going on?”

“I don’t know. Maybe they’re avoiding conflict in populated areas, maybe some of the soldiers have left since you settled things with America, and maybe they’ve predicted where we’re headed and have gathered all their forces there. Whatever the case, we need to get through while there are no interferences.”

Some warmer clothes would have been nice, but they could not risk having the bridge blocked off while they shopped. They wanted to avoid swimming through the icy ocean, so they resisted and made their way to the bridge.

The steel frame and concrete bridge looked out of place in that city of stone pavement and brick.

The giant bridge had both a road and a railway.

It was perfectly straight like a runway, it continued for more than a kilometer, and two people were standing in the middle.

As soon as Kamijou saw them, he felt his throat dry up.

“You’re…kidding.”

One was a nun wearing a white habit with gold embroidery.

The other was a girl wearing a coat over monotone clothes with a chic piano look.

As allies, they were endlessly reliable.

So how much of a threat would they be as enemies?

“Index and Birdway.”

He immediately held one hand out horizontally as if protecting Othinus behind him.

He knew this combination was dangerous.

They were bad enough as individuals, but they were definitively dangerous when working together.

One was a grimoire library that had accurately stored 103,000 grimoires and the other was an extremely high-level magician who could wield that knowledge as real power.

They were greater than the sum of their parts. In fact, they were greater than the product of their parts. He could not even imagine how high their strength could grow.

“I’m not going to bother with questions,” said Birdway bluntly. “I can take my time doing that after defeating and restraining you. This situation needs to be dealt with as quickly as possible.”

“Touma.”

The silver-haired, green-eyed nun who was always by his side now called his name.

But she did so from a distance and not from his side.

“I don’t think it’s right to apply our world’s reasoning to someone like you, but I can’t back down here. The person behind you is a threat under our rules.”

Index and Birdway’s stances were clear.

They would defeat Kamijou and Othinus and bring an end to the chaos. It did not matter how this had happened or where they were headed. Kamijou could talk or not. Whichever he chose, those girls would defeat them.

Realizing that, he tightly clenched his right fist and opened his mouth to speak.

“Ehh? I just settled all this with Misaka, so do I really have to go over the same stuff again?”

……

Index and Birdway came to a stop.

Othinus was well-known as the queen of ignoring the atmosphere, but even she began to fidget awkwardly behind him.

He then gave the finishing blow.

“Oh, I know! You can just call Misaka. It’d be faster to have her explain it. That way we don’t have to get into a fight here.”

“Heh…heh heh.” Birdway shook slightly while hanging her head. “We have 103,000 grimoires here. If used correctly, that crystallization of knowledge is said to provide the possibility of raising one to the level of magic god. In this short time, we’ve been able to make a good guess as to what happened between you two back then.”

“Eh? Ah! W-wait a sec. You mean you understand that there was an infinite hell in that short time!? Then there’s no reason for us to-…”

“There is now, you fool!!!!!!”

Birdway’s shout was accompanied by physical lightning dropping from the heavens.

“I-I was planning to go easy on you and *taking over for you*, but I can’t forgive you now. I really will make a crushed frog out of you!!”

Kamijou trembled in fear and turned to Index for help, but the silver-haired nun shook her head with a completely blank expression.

“Touma, I think you need two or three months in a hospital bed to recover.”

With that, those magical monsters created by thoroughly honing irregular skills took action.

Part 2

Index and Birdway’s formation was obvious.

Birdway took a step forward and Index took a step back. One was the front-line fighter and the other was the support unit. That division of roles was simple and optimal.

(Are they cautious because of Othinus? Do they not know she’s falling apart inside due to the fairy spell?)

However, Index's primary means of attack were Spell Intercept and Sheol Fear which were meant to be used exclusively against magicians and clergymen. Kamijou doubted those techniques could do much when he was relying on Imagine Breaker.

Birdway's direct attack magic was a threat and it scared him more than anything that she was being supported by 103,000 grimoires, but if there was a communication lag between each attack, his chances were best if he moved to close range for some infighting. He would not remain unharmed, but he could still win if he forced Birdway down before he collapsed.

But his plans did not exactly pan out.

"Hey, Othinus," said Birdway quietly. "*You can fight too if you want*."

A moment later, a lance grew from the girl's hand with a ridiculous sound.

Kamijou recognized it.

It was made of gold and it had a tree-like design. That weapon of the gods had toyed with the entire world and cornered him in that infinite hell.

"Gungnir!?" shouted Othinus.

"Weren't you listening? *If used right, the 103,000 grimoires in her head contain the possibility to reach the level of a magic god.*"

She grabbed the lance that grew from her palm, rested it on her shoulder, and smiled.

"I hear you stole the plans from Brunhild Eiktobel's head, but there were other ways. …Then again, this isn't the god's weapon itself. A god's weapon can only be used by a god, after all. I fine-tuned it for human use and that twisted its properties a bit."

"Wait a minute." Kamijou glanced at Othinus over his shoulder. "I thought Gungnir was meant to properly control the power of a magic god. It shouldn't do anything if a human uses it!!"

"*Do you really think it ends at what you see before you?*"

Birdway's words sent a chill down his spine.

(It can't be. It can't be!!)

"*What do you call someone who wields the lance of the gods?*"

Magic God Othinus had not been born a magic god. She had used a special method to obtain the knowledge, performed a unique ritual based on that knowledge, and broke out of her human shell.

In that case…

“You mean…you’ve become a magic god!?”

“No,” denied Othinus. “If you truly possessed the lance and you had truly become the head Norse god, you would have needed to sacrifice an eye like I did. That is unavoidable if you want to become me. Even if you start from 100 different points, you can’t travel down the proper route without passing through there. That means you aren’t Odin, you aren’t Othinus, and you aren’t Woden.”

“It doesn’t really matter.”

Birdway slowly rotated her hand to move the lance from her shoulder.

She was not preparing to thrust the blade at her enemies.

She was preparing to throw it.

“All I need to do is produce the same phenomenon as the thrown lance, even if just once. It’s a bit presumptuous to call yourself a god just for wielding the power of destruction, but rude as it might be, it should still give me the right to kill a god.”

Kamijou felt as if the world were growing black before his eyes.

He knew the genuine destruction produced by that lance’s surefire strike. That spell would split apart the entire world, gather the whirl of fragments, and create a giant spear tip out of them. The world of man would be destroyed for the convenience of a god and the surging violence would create a nightmarish attack to wash away an individual.

And this time, there was no way to recreate the world.

If it was destroyed, it was all over.

“Wait, Birdway!! That isn’t the convenient tool you think it is!!”

“I see you think your understanding is greater than mine. When did you become so important, boy?”

That cannon of the gods could only be used once.

It would slaughter all one’s enemies, but it would destroy the entire world along with them.

Before it could be launched and before the world could be transformed into that pure black landscape, Kamijou Touma charged forward.

Part 3

Leivinia Birdway had not actually become a magic god.

Even with the support of 103,000 grimoires, the lance was not actually real.

What she was doing was simple.

Index and Birdway knew two things:

1. Othinus had become a complete magic god.

2. Kamijou Touma and Othinus had fought *somewhere* without their knowledge.

Even with the knowledge of the Index Librorum Prohibitorum, they could not turn anyone into a magic god that quickly. A magic god was a monumental feat that could only be achieved after someone who met certain special conditions made astronomical amounts of preparations.

On the other hand, not reaching the level of a magic god was not the same as not being able to kill a magic god.

(It's simple.)

Birdway smiled while holding the lance.

She used her absolute poker face to suppress the headache eating into the inside of her skull.

She was making full use of 103,000 grimoires' worth of knowledge, so the "poisonous knowledge" flowing from Index was continually contaminating her mind.

In her long life, she would only have one chance at this.

But magicians were the type who said it was a small price to pay if it allowed them to kill a magic god with human hands.

(Othinus and the boy both know how far a magic god can go, so I just have to draw it out of them. I can't reproduce the gods or their weapons, but if I can draw the phenomenon of destruction from their heads, I'll have the means to kill one.)

Spirit-reflecting incense, astral projection, ungaikyo, vengeful spirits of the living, doppelgangers, the temptations of Satan or Mara, the cat that defeated the Norse thunder god in a test of strength, etc. While not the same as the ghost seen by Macbeth, there were legends from all over the world where the traces of the deceased, the form of one's false convictions, the target of one's intense fear, and other things that only exist in one's head were drawn out into reality.

Of course, how well humans could create actual techniques based on those legends was a different story.

Some created illusions in smoke and others created imitations using virtual matter such as ectoplasm, but the spell used to embody it was not what mattered.

The *image source* was most important.

(I get the feeling that she's hiding some *other trump card* beyond the lance, but that's too vague to get a good grip on. We can only rely on the lance that we can understand here in this world.)

Her lance could not control a magic god's power.

Nor could it recreate the world.

It instead focused on the head god's attack. It took that single fragment of the great power of the gods and allowed a human to make a high-quality recreation of that phenomenon which was included in the lance.

What was magic in the first place?

A fragile human could only contain so much. A small human hand could only scoop up a tiny amount. That meant they could not make the legends of the gods their own and they could not completely take the actions of the gods for themselves.

That was why they cut it down to size.

Rather going broad and shallow, they would go narrow and deep. They would extract a single point, repeatedly hone that one point, occasionally expand the interpretation, and ultimately reach an independent and individual technique.

(You could call this an imitation divine technique.)

This was the original form of spells.

It was a strange system that humans created to grant their own wishes, even if it meant desecrating the gods.

And thus it was detested by many religious people and clergymen.

(Man cannot kill a god, but a phenomenon extracted from a magic god should be able to reach that magic god!! She will be destroyed by the very system she created!!)

Not even Birdway knew what would happen once she released that lance.

Her only expectation was for it to be an attack that even Magic God Othinus would believe.

She prepared to launch it.

And a moment before she did, Kamijou dashed right past her.

"...!?"

She was taken aback for a moment but quickly recovered.

(He's not after me!? Is he planning to eliminate my power by defeating the Index Librorum Prohibitorum supporting my spell!?)

She frantically turned around while still holding the lance and realized what he was truly after.

"You monster!! You're trying to use the Index Librorum Prohibitorum as a shield, aren't you!?"

"It doesn't matter where I am! If you launch that lance, the whole world will be blown away!"

She ignored his nonsense and carefully corrected her aim.

The weight of the lance seemed to change in her hand.

This was a weapon to use against a magic god, so it was so very powerful that it was not suited for such a small scale.

Part 4

Kamijou forgot to even breathe as he ran full speed across the bridge.

He was heading toward Index behind Birdway.

He felt a subtle vibration on his cheeks. Index appeared to be silent at first glance, but her mouth was opened ever so slightly and she was taking long breaths. That was the source of the vibration.

She was singing.

Just as ultrasonic waves produced ripples in a cup of water, her song was beyond the range of human hearing and yet she was providing information to Birdway in front of her. Given the situation, she was clearly providing the knowledge of her 103,000 grimoires.

(I need to stop that singing no matter what!!)

His fist was tightly clenched, but he opened the hand and spread the fingers.

He did not need to knock her unconscious. She was not much of a threat to him as he did not know magic. Birdway was enough of a threat on her own, but she was not a special existence that individually rivalled a magic god. If she did have that power, Othinus and Gremlin might have chosen a different path.

And so…

(I just have to cover her mouth and stop the singing!! As long as that lance is gone, I can find a way to handle Birdway!!)

He charged right up to Index.

That girl had always been by his side, he had sworn to protect her no matter what, and he now reached out his right hand as he confronted her head on.

"…!!"

The silver-haired, green-eyed nun silently moved back to escape his hand.

But she only seemed silent. In truth, she was likely still singing.

However, it was too late.

From a purely athletic standpoint, the grimoire library was not much of a threat. That small distance would throw off his aim a little, but his palm could still reach her.

A moment later, his right hand missed her mouth but reached a different point on her body.

Namely, her modest chest.

"……Ah."

By the time he noticed, it was too late.

Her incantation ended with a shrill scream, the lance in Birdway's hand grew unstable and exploded, and the nun's full collection of 32 teeth spread out before his eyes.

Part 5

“Touma! You have no delicacy at all!! It’s like you only think about winning or you think anything is acceptable as long as you win!! Winning isn’t the only thing that matters! I highly recommend you read Le Morte d'Arthur, The Song of Roland, and other things to further your education!! Are you even listening, Touma!?”

“……”

“……”

There was no way he could be listening.

He and Birdway were lying face down on the long, runway-like bridge and twitching. Othinus was crouched down next to him and poking at his spiky head with her index finger.

He was reminded of when she had spun around in front of a mirror and ridden around on an electric two-wheeled vehicle in that infinite hell.

As he and Birdway lay unmoving so close that their heads were almost touching, he asked her a question.

“How much do you know about what happened to us?”

“Nothing specific. But if the lance was completed and the magic god used her full power, she wouldn’t bother with mere physical attacks. Presumably, she would remake the entire world into one where none of those unnecessary things existed in the first place.”

Rather than just being destroyed once, the world had been remade into millions or even billions of forms to break Kamijou’s mind, but it seemed their imagination had not brought them that far.

Magicians prioritized the individual over the whole, but they had not thought of one thoroughly remaking the world for a one-on-one battle.

“What did you see in the changed world?” asked Birdway.

“I’m not sure… Now that I think about it, there may not have been anything new there,” he spat out. “But I was reminded of a really basic thing. That’s all. …And now that I know that, I can no longer innocently act in the name of justice. I can’t kill Othinus anymore. I’m going to try to stop this worldwide chaos with whatever other method I can. I can never again choose to kill Othinus. I can never again choose to kill a mere girl and smile about it.”

“Hah.” Birdway raised her head from the ground. “You just called her a girl, didn’t you? This is Magic God Othinus, leader of Gremlin. She’s already destroyed the world…maybe even more than once.”

“I know.”

Kamijou removed his head from the snow as well and looked her in the eye.

“Do you have a problem with that?”

“Now it all finally makes sense.”

She rolled onto her back and brought a hand to her forehead.

“I should have known. This is exactly the kind of person you are! Goddammit!! I was thinking about the fate of the world, the leader of Gremlin, when you had a chance to communicate with them, and what information you could have leaked to them! But now I feel like an idiot for taking it all so seriously!! Because she’s a ‘mere girl’, hm? You really are hopeless, dammit!!!!”

Hearing that, he slowly stood up and looked to the other side of the bridge.

It seemed to continue on forever.

“We’ll be going.”

“Touma!! I’m not done speaking with you!!”

Index tried to snap at him some more, but Birdway wrapped her arms around the nun’s legs from the ground.

“How are you going to settle this?” asked Birdway.

“Neutralize Othinus’s power and hand her over to America.”

“Do you have a way to do that?”

“If not, I would’ve broken long ago.”

That answer caused Birdway to hold Index’s legs even tighter and the silver-haired nun almost tripped.

“Then it would be a bad idea to bring this girl with you. If she perfectly memorized the trump card to use against a monstrous magic god, the threat around her as the Index Librorum Prohibitorum would rise to the next level. I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t interested, but I like the idea of having you owe me one.”

“Then look after her.”

“Will do.”

Birdway wrapped her arms around Index’s waist as she took on the role of restraining that girl who was almost guaranteed to get lost on her own.

Kamijou and Othinus travelled down the bridge and Birdway muttered to herself as she watched their departing backs.

“From the looks of it, he watched the destruction of the world. Yet even that wasn’t enough to change him.”

CHAPTER 18

V.S. “The One who Opposes the Magic God”.

Round_10.

Part 1

They crossed the bridge and reached the island of Funen, but Kamijou was unsure how exactly it differed from the peninsula. They were still surrounded by snow and it did not even feel like an island.

“It may be called an island, but it’s 50 kilometers across,” explained Othinus. “It won’t seem much different than before unless we follow the coast.”

“Where do we go next?”

“We’re almost there. This is the same island as Egeskov Castle where my eye is submerged. We’ll arrive after passing through the city of Odense.”

Funen had not been the site of frequent battles, so the chaos had yet to spread there. A few cars were even travelling along the snowy roads.

They tried hitchhiking for the first time in a while and easily got a ride. Tourists on their way to the railway museum carried them to the Odense in their rental car.

The boy in the back seat continued pestering Othinus, so Kamijou finally asked her about it.

“He’s asking me what picture book witch I am. He seems to think this is a costume from an Andersen story.”

It was likely better for the boy not to know the truth.

Odense was another stone-paved and brick city, but it was much larger and livelier than the previous cities. It had a large number of church steeples and similar structures, so it looked like a conifer forest silhouette made in stone.

Kamijou quickly left the rental car.

“L-let’s finally buy some coats. I don’t want to freeze right at the end.”

“After coming this far, don’t you think we’ll be fine like this?”

“You’d be more convincing if your lips weren’t blue.”

They walked around the shopping district but found nothing worthwhile. They did find coats, but they were all too expensive.

“Odense is one of Denmark’s leading tourist areas and they know what their customers are going to be looking for. We won’t find anything reasonably priced here.”

“You’re kidding. I feel like the snow is about to pile up to my head.”

That meant they needed to hurry up and find the next vehicle to hitchhike with.

“Just twenty kilometers to go. It isn’t too far to walk if we have to.”

“Even though we don’t know who’s waiting for us? I don’t want muscle pain to trip me up and get me defeated right at the very end.”

They would find the most vehicles in front of the train station, so they walked through the city to reach the station north of the theatre.

A large park was located between the theatre and station.

According to Othinus, it was known as the King’s Garden, but Kamijou frowned as soon as he set foot in it.

No matter how much it was snowing and how much snow covered the ground, it was clearly odd for there to be no one around in this tourist area. Snow was apparently rare in Denmark, but wouldn’t that mean children would be taking advantage of the great event by playing in the snow? There were plenty of fun things that could only be done in the snow, yet there was no sign of anyone else in that white landscape.

“Not good.”

“A people clearing field. It’s standard practice, but they’ve set one up in the middle of the city and in broad daylight.”

As soon as they spoke, two new figures appeared to cut off their path in the white park.

Kamijou had no idea how they had approached. There were no extra footprints; Kamijou and Othinus's were the only ones.

"Do you remember us? We did meet in Academy City before."

One was a woman with short blonde hair and who wore thick pants, a sweatshirt, a work apron, and goggles to create the overall silhouette of a maid.

The other was a woman wearing a short dress, pants, a bulletproof vest, and elbow and knee protectors to create the silhouette of a warrior woman from a video game.

Kamijou did not know the details, but he recognized these two as being on Ollerus's side.

"I'm Silvia and this is Brunhild. We're both Saints, but I suppose that isn't all that unusual. After all, you already ran into one from England, didn't you?"

He shuddered at how carefree her tone was.

Two Saints. Those monsters could move at supersonic speeds and attack from two directions at once. And this time there were no "invisible blind spots" he could exploit as he did with Kanzaki Kaori. Fighting normally was his only option and fighting normally would undoubtedly lead to his death.

And on top of that…

"Does this mean he's here too?" he asked while moving his eyes around to check his surroundings. "Ollerus isn't here too, is he?"

Silvia's eyebrows twitched at that question.

He did not know what had become of Ollerus. Othinus had told him the man had used the fairy spell, but he did not know that the man had been weakened with the exact same spell or that he had been defeated by the fierce attacks of a full-power magic god.

And so he rubbed her the wrong way.

"He's here too," replied Silvia. "But there's a good reason why he isn't out here. Othinus, you should understand why. *And you should understand what I want to do after seeing that horrific scene.*"

"…"

Othinus merely narrowed her one eye.

She was not going to say much.

As Kamijou looked over his shoulder, the woman named Brunhild shrugged.

“Just so you know, I’m not part of her personal grudge.”

A dull sound filled the air as she kicked up the giant sword at her feet and grabbed the hilt with one hand.

“But if this magic god will bring harm to *that boy*, I have no choice. I will ensure his peace even if it means turning her to a stain on the road.”

(This is bad.)

He had no hope of winning. He could not even picture the first step in his mind. No matter which direction he moved in, he could only imagine himself being instantly killed.

And that line of thinking was not wrong.

Silvia vanished, a tremendous impact struck him, and he flew over ten meters like a bullet.

Part 2

His mind couldn’t keep up.

“Gbah!!!???”

The next thing he knew, Othinus and the others were incredibly far away. His lungs were trembling too much to take in a proper breath of air, his legs were shaking, and he heard a horrible scraping noise from his back.

He did not feel the pull of gravity.

It took him several moments to realize he was floating above the surface.

It took him several moments more to realize his back had struck the thick trunk of a conifer tree and he was falling to the ground from there.

“Cough…cough cough!! Gweh! Gbah!!”

His body slid down and the white snow covering the grass was dyed red. More clumps of blood flowed out every time he let out a breath.

“Human!! Dammit!”

Othinus tried to shout something, but she was suddenly cut off. Instead, he heard a sound of impact so spectacular he thought it had used gunpowder.

His vision was blurry and his consciousness was sinking into darkness, but that sound sent his blood boiling. He could barely move his limbs, but he bared his bloody teeth and shouted out.

“Othinus!! Stop… Don’t touch her!!”

His desperate attempt to stand was enough to produce strange popping noises from his body. The impact may have dislocated some bone or another. He ignored the continuing waves of intense pain from an unknown source and gave a yell as he stood up once more.

All sound vanished.

Silvia had already approached right before him.

Their eyes met for an instant and her eyes contained the emotionless look of an insect.

Another impact came.

Her slender arm and small fist stabbed into the center of his chest as if targeting the heart. His back was slammed against the thick tree as if by a wooden hammer. The impact and inertia pinned him to the tree and Silvia whispered to him at close range.

“Your circumstances no longer matter.”

Another impact.

“I don’t care if you were in cahoots with Gremlin ahead of time, if Othinus gave you some kind of suggestion, or if you truly came to understand the girl named Othinus and joined her side.”

Another.

“Joining her side is enough. Joining with the one who not only took all of that giant idiot’s power but also tore his body apart is enough! That’s all it takes to be in my murderous sights!!!!!!”

Another.

Chest, gut, face. Her ultra-heavyweight fist struck him again and again. One strike would knock away his consciousness, but she would not allow him to pass out and the next strike would shake him back to consciousness. During this, the hard sensation on his back vanished.

The thick trunk had broken from the impacts passing through his body.

With nothing to support him, he flew further backwards. He was almost nothing but a bloody lump and he stained the snowscape as he bounced across it.

“Gah…ah…ha…”

He could no longer speak properly. Most of his vision had darkened, but even in that narrow dark tunnel exit, he could see the monster known as a Saint approaching.

If that was all, he would not have had the strength to stand back up.

But he remembered something: there was another Saint.

Why had the monster named Brunhild not attacked him? If she was not targeting him, who would that Saint be attacking?

“…”

After thinking that far, strength returned to his legs.

His head shook and he could barely tell up from down, but he still desperately stood on unsteady legs.

But that angered the Saint named Silvia all the more.

“Fine then.”

He heard the sound of a group of fine threads tearing.

It was the sound of the corners of Silvia’s mouth splitting in the shape of a smile.

“I’ll disembowel you with my bare hands and show each of your organs to that magic god. You’re the treasured partner she abandoned all of Gremlin to be with. Even a magic god won’t find it easy to watch as you’re vivisected before her eyes.”

The threat approached.

Part 3

“He” watched on.

♦

Brunhild Eiktobel narrowed her clever eyes.

She stabbed her large sword into the snow and dryly observed. As she watched, a wooden bench was smashed to pieces and an eyepatch-wearing girl lay in the center of the rubble.

She had not held back.

In fact, she had been more cautious than necessary.

(She's showing surprisingly little resistance.)

That was her honest opinion.

Was something interfering with Othinus's power as a magic god or was she trying to make Brunhild let her guard down? Brunhild was not sure, but if Othinus wielded the power of a complete magic god, it would not matter if Brunhild had her guard up.

Brunhild had once created a high-quality Gungnir. She had not reached the level of magic god herself, but the abilities of the lance may have given her a general idea of what a magic god was and what a magic god could do.

In truth, she was bound by her imagination and Magic God Othinus's abilities had gone well beyond that, but that was not the main point here.

(Should I simply accept that she can't use her full power?)

She used a single hand to pull out the sword that had enough weight to crush a car. She rested it on her shoulder and approached Othinus and the crushed bench.

(Is her loss of power temporary or permanent? It's hard to say, but I should kill her while I have the chance.)

She frowned a bit as she thought.

She herself was a magician whose power increased and decreased between extremes on a set cycle, much like the waxing and waning of the moon. A cruel magic cabal had once taken advantage of that and destroyed those around her.

She was doing the same here.

But to ensure safety, she would justify her own suspicions and launch a harsh attack.

A bitter feeling filled her chest, but she did not stop walking.

The boy in his hospital bed was all that mattered.

She would put up with contradicting herself for him.

“Pray.”

“Who is a god supposed to pray to…?”

“The proper answer at times like this is to picture the face of one you love.”

Brunhild spat out her words and placed her other hand on the hilt of her sword. She would hold it in both hands to crush Magic God Othinus with all her might.

♦

“He” watched on.

♦

Just before she acted, something flew over like a bullet. The dark red mass came from the side. She accurately spotted the object flying her way and knocked it to the ground with the bottom of her sword’s hilt.

A disgusting sticky sound filled the air.

The “object” was what had been an Asian boy a moment before.

“Wait, Brunhild,” said a devilish voice.

The figure that walked over was stained a dark red.

“Don’t kill her that easily. That isn’t enough to pay for what she’s done. Before killing that damn magic god, I want to take at least one precious thing from her. *That will be a lot more fun.*”

Brunhild frowned at Silvia’s state, looked down at what was supposedly a boy, and frowned even deeper.

“I have nothing against killing the magic god now, but I have no obligation to go along with your cruel fun.”

“Then do I need to make another bloody mass like that? I will if you insist.”

♦

“He” watched on.

♦

The dark red mass was still trembling slightly.

He was breathing.

That simple fact brought movement to the utterly destroyed bench. The eyepatch girl could not stand, so she moved as if crawling along the snow. She moved slowly and sluggishly, but she still made progress toward the bloody mass lying on the snow.

“Hu…man…”

She moved her bloody lips to squeeze out the word.

Her eyes sought him.

She looked like the Little Match Girl seeing her dream inside the final flame.

“This is why…I told you…nothing good would come of…going with me…”

She would not allow that flame to go out. She would not have this hope taken.

The way the magic god used her battered hands to drag her body along made that clear.

But Brunhild remained perfectly dry.

Her expression remained unchanged and she stomped on the magic god’s right shoulder. That was all it took to stop her slow progress.

“What will it take to satisfy you?”

“Isn’t it obvious? I’ll tear out this brat’s organs as she watches. I’ll make sure he’s still alive and moving his mouth the whole time like a fish served alive.”

“Stop…”

Othinus was pinned to the snow by the great pressure from above, but she reached out her bloody hand.

No matter what she tried, she could not reach the dark red mass before her.

“You’re after me. If you eliminate me, you can end the chaos filling the world. He has nothing to do with it. Just killing me is enough to eliminate your own chaos, so…”

“I don’t care.” The words spilled from Silvia’s mouth and more sticky words continued. “As long as I can kill you, nothing else matters. As long as I can take revenge for that bastard Ollerus, I don’t care if I go insane. You don’t understand. You really don’t. I don’t *want* to go back to normal. If I do, it’ll end there. I get the feeling I’ll end up forgiving you. But I don’t want that. Do you understand? It’s not whether I can or not. I don’t want to, so I’m choosing not to.”

Brunhild had a silent thought when she heard that.

(I need to kill the magic god without waiting for Silvia’s instructions.)

Even now, she was not underestimating Othinus’s power. She would show no kindness and she would kill when she could kill. She did not want to allow some “fun” now and regret it later.

“Then let’s get started,” said Brunhild coldly while secretly holding the sword’s hilt with tremendous strength.

In the instant Silvia was focused on the boy, she would crush and kill Othinus. She was prepared to battle an enraged Silvia afterwards, but she would make sure to swiftly kill Othinus now. That was her top priority.

“Stop…”

Othinus’s dim voice continued and she desperately reached out a hand as if someone had taken a stuffed animal from her.

“Stop!! He has nothing to do with my sins! There’s no reason to make him bear them! So please!!”

Her desperate plea did not reach them.

The two Saints took decisive action and a tremendous wind roared.

♦

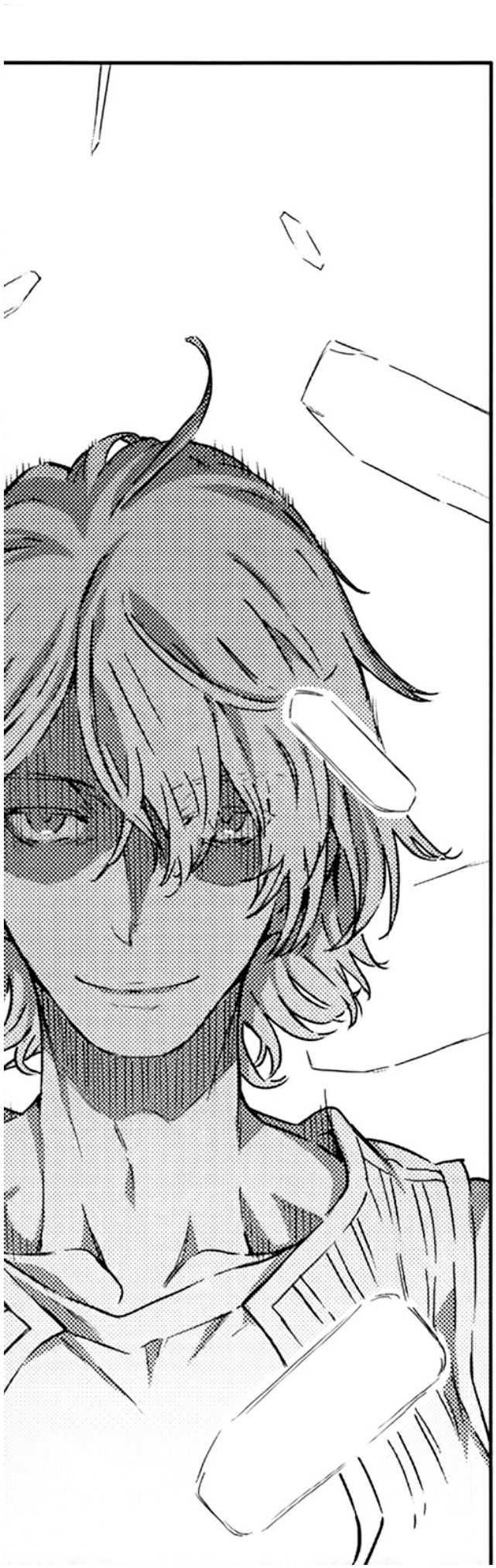
“He” watched on.

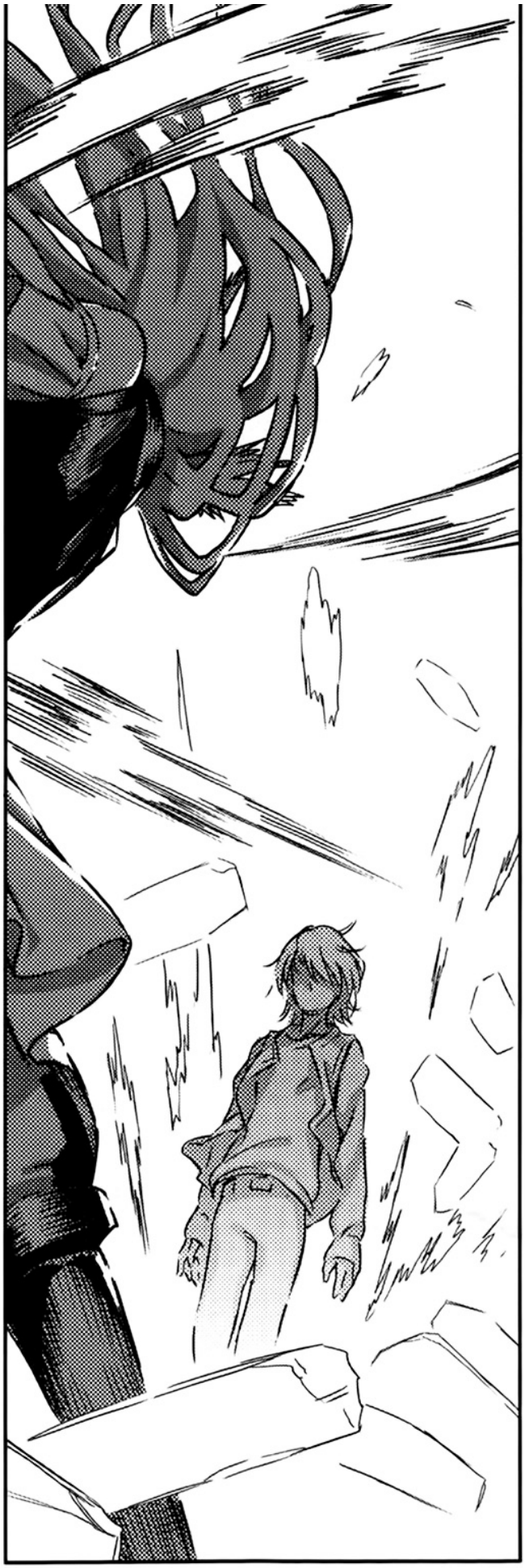
And so…

♦

A sticky explosive sound burst out.

The great noise came from Ollerus as he cut between the two Saints.





But due to the fairy spell, he did not possess any of his special power from being near magic godhood. The strength of his body and the magic he could use were both weaker than the average magician's.

His will made up for what he lacked.

The action he took was simple. He enclosed his arms around the large sword Brunhild swung down. However, he could never stop an attack launched at the speed of sound. The incredible friction tore his hands to pieces.

Even as his hands continued to be destroyed to divert the path of the large sword, he moved those hands.

He tugged so as to pull the sword and Brunhild toward him. He had the sword cross paths with Silvia's empty-handed strike.

"What!?"

"Ollerus!! You idiot!!"

The women spoke up in surprise, but it was too late.

A great roar rang out. To someone watching on, it may have looked like the two Saints collided at frightening speed and collapsed into the deep snow.

The two Saints had been defeated at the cost of Ollerus's arms.

Those arms fluttered in the wind like plastic string and it was clear the damage had gone well beyond a broken bone.

"Have you…"

Othinus coughed up blood and could not even stand.

"Have you come to kill me too?"

"Do you remember what I said before?" answered Ollerus with a composed face and with his bloody arms dangling down. "I have no more attachment to the bonds of being a magic god. As long as I can defeat you, nothing else matters."

"…"

"But it seems it was someone else who accomplished it." He smiled thinly. "I had hoped he would act as bait to lure you out, but I certainly didn't expect him to take it this far."

"You have reason to kill me, don't you?"

“Undoubtedly.” His tone was calm. “But if Kamijou Touma dies here, you will develop into a more frightening monster than anything you have shown so far. Similarly, if you die here, a great change might come over Kamijou Touma’s nature. I do not like the sound of either one. As I said, I have no more attachment. If you hold a relationship that will weaken you more than anything else, acting to preserve it is not a bad option.”

“Your ‘kindness’ is as irritating as ever.”

“That’s just who I am. I’m aware I’ve lost quite a bit because of it, though.”

“Is that ‘kindness’ really worth choosing even if it means defeating your own allies?”

“The one with you has done the same. Silvia especially is the type who won’t be swayed by words, but she’ll return to her usual clever self if she has time to cool her head.”

He looked toward the two collapsed in the snow.

“I’ll work to persuade them and I’ll keep at it until they understand, so you don’t have to worry about anything.”

While coughing, Othinus finally managed to stand on unsteady legs.

She stroked Kamijou’s back as he continued to breathe even as a dark red mass. She wrapped an arm around his shoulder and somehow managed to get him to his feet.

“I won’t…thank you…”

“Even this is an attack against you in my mind.”

Ollerus shrugged while ignoring his arms swaying as they dangled down.

Only after cautiously backing away to a certain distance did Othinus turn around. She lent her shoulder to Kamijou who was barely conscious and Ollerus asked her one final question.

“Did you find what you were looking for?”

“You weren’t the one who understood me. He was a lot stronger than you.”

With that, the distance of their destinies opened infinitely wide.

CHAPTER 19

V.S. “The Hammer-Wielding Almighty God”.

Round_11.

Part 1

Egeskov Castle was made of brick and constructed atop a foundation of countless oaks.

Great effort had gone into constructing that fortress and, even five hundred years later, it was a great boon to Odense and other nearby cities as a tourist attraction.

But the castle itself was not what mattered to those gathered there.

They cared about the lake.

Long before the giant castle was built, Othinus had used that lake for “something”. The castle had been built with no knowledge of that, so not even the front line magicians had noticed the traces of the enormous ritual that had occurred there.

However…

“Well, I guess I shouldn’t be surprised,” said the woman known as Hel from the white wasteland next to the lake.

“Even if the coalition didn’t catch on, we were all part of Gremlin,” said the boy named Jörmungandr. “We might not be able to reach the level of magic god, but we can guess what she’s thinking.”

“I’m glad I didn’t leak the information for fun,” said the young man named Fenrir. “It looks like they still haven’t figured it out, so we’re the first ones here.”

They were the direct combat members of Gremlin and each of them could singlehandedly battle an entire army, but they were not alone. Dozens if not hundreds of figures could be glimpsed in the white curtain of snow blown into the air.

“Is Loki here too?”

“Even if he is, he’s probably hiding behind someone. That’s just the kind of guy he is.”

“It’s hilarious that the rear guard such as Iðunn and Sif are here too. It looks like we’re all pissed.”

The members of Gremlin did not understand the purpose of that lake.

They did not know she was trying to cast aside her power. They thought it contained the key to some “true plan” that she had hidden from them.

That was enough of a betrayal.

They had all helped Othinus become a magic god and fought so she would grant their wishes. No matter how cruel the task, they had dirtied their hands. They would make her pay for dangling that dream in front of them and then snatching it away. And that payment might include physically tearing her to pieces.

Suddenly, a new figure walked up through the snow.

The many figures beyond the curtain of blowing snow parted to create a path. The person who boldly made his way to the center was not someone Fenrir, Jörmungandr, and Hel could ignore.

“Thor.”

“Yeah, it’s the real one this time.” He raised a hand in greeting while grinning. “This is pretty amazing. Are all of you waiting here to kill Othinus? It’s kind of sad that no one’s sticking with her.”

“You’re here to kill her too, aren’t you?”

“Well, yeah. But I’m not doing it out of hatred. It sounds like a fun fight, and that’s all that matters. I’d be lying if I said I was never interested in the experience points I’d get for defeating her.” He spread his arms and made a suggestion. “But if we’re gonna present our complaints to her, why not come to an agreement first? Let’s decide on a representative. If we all start shouting complaints from every direction, it’ll just be a deluge of noise. You want your complaints to actually reach her, don’t you?”

They all perked up at the word “representative”.

For better or for worse, Gremlin had always been gathered underneath Othinus’s absolute charisma. Now that they had lost her, who would lead the organization? Would they go with the standard and choose the lightning god? Or would they prepare a new position?

“How exactly will we decide on that?” asked Hel.

“Did you think I was going to use anything as boring as tradition, influence, connections, or assets?” asked the other god while closing one eye. “*Let’s figure out who’s strongest in a giant free-for-all. That sounds like the most fun.*”

Part 2

Kamijou Touma and Othinus were soaked with blood.

They could not hitchhike in that state and so they walked through the white blizzard.

“Have you decided yet, Othinus?”

“Decided what?”

“What path you’ll head down once all this is over.”

Kamijou spoke quietly as they leaned against each other for support.

“I said it could be a bakery or a flower shop or whatever else, remember? So have you found what you want to do?”

“Ha ha. I’m not cut out for those cute things.”

“I don’t know how much you’ll have to wait, so it can be anything. It doesn’t matter if it doesn’t suit you or isn’t like you. Find whatever it is you want to do the most. That’ll make it all the more worthwhile to root for you.”

“What I want to do, hm?”

She fell silent for a while.

“Can it really be anything?”

“Why are you asking me?”

“Because I want to ask you. Can I really pursue any dream I want?”

She stared at the side of his face from close up.

He had lost a lot of blood and his swollen eyelids must have narrowed his vision because he did not notice her expression.

“Of course you can,” he immediately replied.

“I see.”

Hearing that, her mouth opened in a small smile.

“What? Did you find your dream?”

“I have no reason to tell you what it is.”

“…?”

He turned his battered face toward her, but she had already returned her expression to normal.

Asking further would accomplish nothing, so he continued on while hoping she would eventually tell him.

He was unsure how long they had been walking.

He had lost almost all feeling in his snow-covered feet.

Eventually, a giant shadow came into view through the white snow blowing through the air.

“Egeskov Castle,” said Othinus with trembling lips.

Kamijou moved his head sluggishly.

“So we’ve made it. That castle isn’t filled with traps like in a room escape game, is it?”

“The castle doesn’t actually matter. I threw the eye in the lake before it was even built. The lake is the important part, but no one’s found the eye because everyone focuses on the castle that came later.”

While taking shallow breaths, they somehow arrived on the edge of the lake surrounding the castle.

But then they noticed something.

Something they would much rather have not noticed.

“Hi there,” said a voice.

A giant stairway and throne lay beyond the white curtain of blowing snow. No, it was not a throne atop a stairway the boy was sitting on.

They were humans.

He was sitting at the top of a pile of fifty or even one hundred people.

“Lightning God Thor!?”

“Oh, these are all Gremlin members. If you ask Othinus, she’ll probably give you an explanation on each and every one of them. She can be arrogant, but she loves explaining things while looking down on you. They were planning to gang up on you, but I went ahead and crushed them all because that sounded boring. I didn’t even get all that much experience for my trouble.”

“But you aren’t about to let us through, are you?” asked Othinus.

Thor gave a short bit of sarcastic applause.

“Of course not. I’m not your ally. In fact, being your enemy sounds like more fun. Oh, and Kamijou-chan. This is a lot more like it. You had completely rotted away when I saw you back in Academy City, but I think I can enjoy myself plenty now. Having a monster like Magic God Othinus as an added bonus just makes it perfect. Honestly, this is one of the greatest servings of experience I’ve ever seen. I really think my stomach might burst.”

“Watch out,” whispered Othinus. “We already dealt with Mjölnir, so he isn’t being supported by his hammer. That means he’s lost his power as the lightning god.”

“…? Wait. You make it sound like that doesn’t weaken him.”

“If he was acting as the lightning god, even you would stand a chance of defeating him,” she spat out. “But that isn’t the case if he brings out his power as an almighty god. This massacre was his doing. Simply put, a mere lightning god couldn’t do this much damage.”

“Hah hah hah. Thanks for the explanation. See? Told you she likes explaining things.”

While speaking casually, Thor slowly stood up from the pile of humans.

“So what’ll you do? Attack me together? Or will this be one-on-one with Kamijou-chan. I’m fine with either one, but hurry up and decide.”

“Why have you decided that I can’t use my full power and will not be fighting?”

“That’s easy. If you were at your full power, you wouldn’t be relying on Kamijou-chan in the first place.”

In that comment alone, his tone was icy.

Thor had betrayed Othinus to rescue Fräulein Kreutune. He likely had his own reasons, but Kamijou could not deny that he had rescued a girl from unreasonable circumstances for nothing in return. And from Thor’s standards, it was only natural for him to scorn the actions of the “former” Othinus.

Othinus tried to say something, but Kamijou held out a hand to stop her.

“It’ll be one-on-one,” he said.

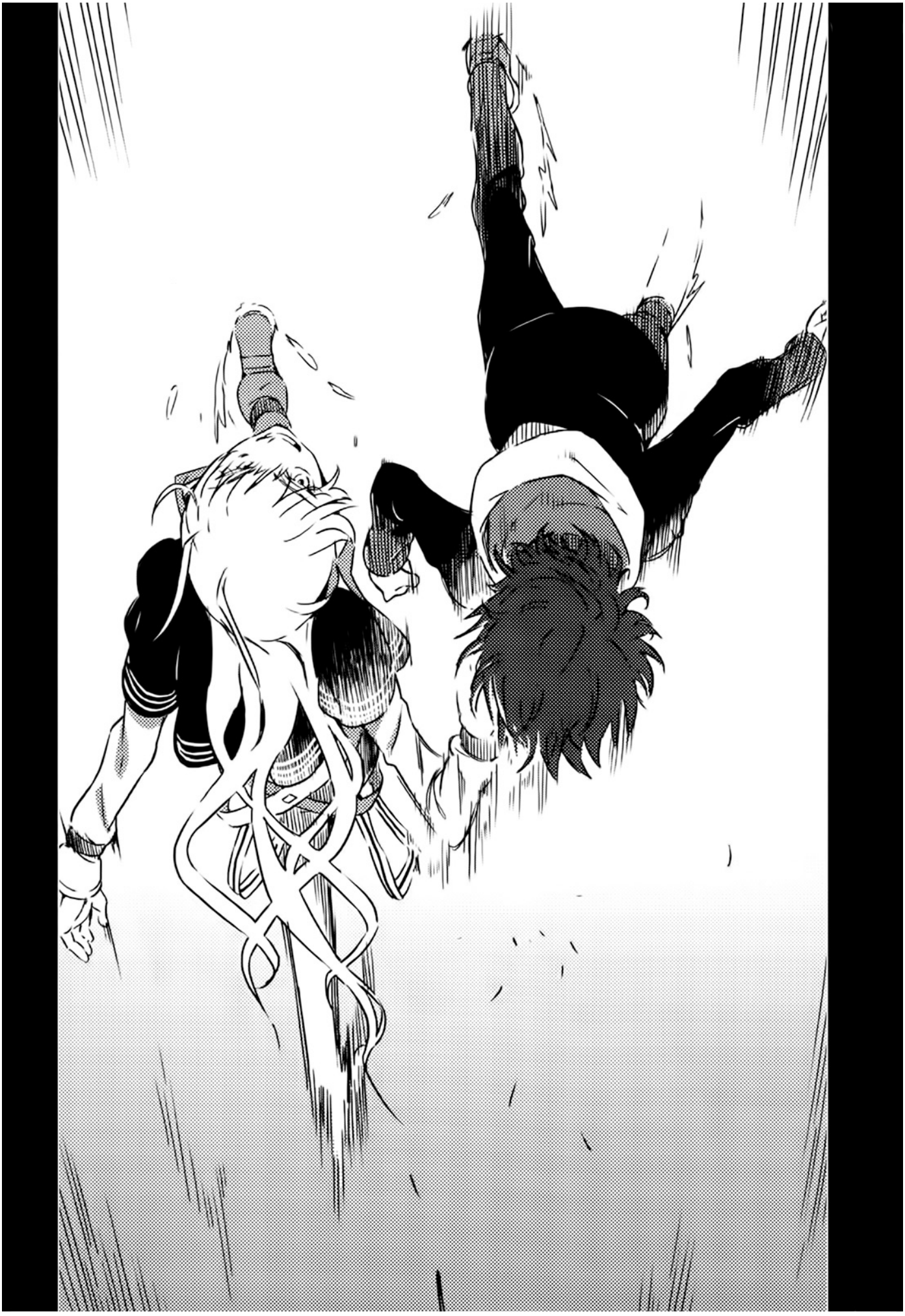
“Ha ha! Now we’re talking! I knew you’d say that, Kamijou-chan!!”

Thor laughed as he descended from Gremlin’s throne and walked down the steps made from human bodies.

“In that case, I won’t be holding back. That’d just be rude. The stage has been set so perfectly, so I’ll show you Almighty Thor.”

He spread his arms to show himself off.

And a moment later, a tremendous noise burst out.



Someone's fist had smashed into Kamijou.

He looked down and gradually followed the fist to the arm, the arm to the shoulder, and on from there. Finally, he found Thor's face.

"Let me enjoy this, baby."

Kamijou did not understand what had happened.

The impact spread throughout his entire body and he literally flew to the side.

Part 3

Kamijou rolled along the snow.

Instead of breathing, he coughed up dark red blood.

"Gh…kah…!!"

His breathing sounded sticky as he drowned in his own blood. He could feel his consciousness flickering in and out, but he also had another thought.

The force of the fist had been no less than that of a normal human. At the very least, it had not been as violent as a jackhammer. He was only coughing up blood because of the previous damage accumulated in his ribs.

However, that did not eliminate the threat.

What had just happened?

What sort of phenomenon had it been?

"Teleportation?"

"Try to be a little more imaginative." Thor shook his bloody right hand while smiling. "I'm known as an almighty god right now, y'know? If Othinus hadn't gouged out her eye, I'd be leading Gremlin. You need to widen your view if you want to talk about me."

In that moment, Thor was standing over five meters away.

But the next thing Kamijou knew, the boy had grabbed his hair.

As he tried to stand up, he was slammed back to the snow.

Thor's heel dropped on his chest and his gut again and again. He repeatedly applied pressure to Kamijou's organs as casually as crushing an empty can.

"Gah…fh!!"

Kamijou tried his best to reach out his arm while all the oxygen was forced from his lungs. He tried to grab at Thor's ankle.

Thor vanished again.

He was about one meter above and he gathered his feet to crush Kamijou's gut with his full weight.

An unpleasant noise came from his body.

"Bgh…hah!!!??"

(It's not just that I can't touch him. He returns with an attack at the same time. Is this some supernatural power that lets him make a cross counter with 100% accuracy!?)

While lying on his back, he reached a trembling hand toward Thor's leg.

A dull pain rushed through his side.

Almighty Thor had jabbed his toes into his side as if kicking a soccer ball and the great force sent him rolling along the ground.

For an instant, Kamijou thought the white sky had grown distorted.

He simply assumed it was his failing consciousness.

"Hm. If it was night, that might've worked as a simpler hint."

"What…? You mean…that wasn't an illusion?"

"I'm not moving."

Hearing that, Kamijou placed a hand in the snow and grabbed a few stones underneath it.

He threw them all at once.

"There's no need to bother heading out just to kill my enemy."

"There's no need to bother heading out just to kill my enemy."

"There's no need to bother heading out just to kill my enemy."

Thor's voice seemed to blur into several different voices.

Several Thors stood there such that all of the thrown stones missed. No, that was not accurate. Those were the afterimages of the boy naming himself an almighty god.

"I told you to widen your view, didn't I?"

The next voice came from directly behind him.

Thor's clenched fist had already jabbed into Kamijou's spine.

He launched his elbow backwards.

His elbow flew through empty air and Thor was already standing directly in front of him. The boy's knee jabbed forcefully into the center of his gut.

Kamijou could not breathe.

He started to stagger backwards, but Thor grabbed his collar with one hand and pulled him forward. Thor swung his forehead down and Kamijou fell to the snow once more.

The distorting sky. A method of moving in an instant. A method different from the teleportation seen in Academy City. A technique within Gremlin. Something Kamijou himself had seen. Something he himself had experienced. How had Othinus taken him to Denmark?

"You aren't the one moving…"

While taking shallow breaths, Kamijou moved his bloody lips.

His expression made it clear he could not believe his own theory.

"It's the world that's moving. You just have to stand still and the entire world is altered like a conveyer belt to carry the desired target to you."

"Took you long enough. It'd be one thing if you hadn't had any hints, but I already showed it to you in that Academy City container yard and I assume Othinus showed you her precious Bone Boat when you two vanished. Maybe I should've held back a bit and made it look more like some mysterious attack. I could've said something like 'Mwa ha ha. I can stop time'."

The game piece of Almighty Thor remained in place while the world map laid below it was moved.

It sounded simply unbelievable, but Kamijou knew of a technique that would make it possible.

“The battles in Baggage City were also an experiment to see if holistic espers existed. That ridiculous system would smash together multiple distant galaxies to fire flames from the hand. Are you saying you’ve reached that?”

“That’s not what this is. Do you understand why?”

Thor grinned and placed a hand on his hip.

It was obvious he was waiting for Kamijou to steady his breathing.

He sought an even more stimulating battle to gain even more experience points.

“That would eliminate Gremlin’s reason for targeting Fräulein Kreutune,” said Kamijou. “If you already had a holistic esper, you would’ve used it in your plan.”

“I’m similar but different. It might be a lot like the relationship between Ollerus and the #7. I’m the approximation of someone from the science side. I can produce almost the exact same phenomenon, but I’m not actually one of them. I really am a magician, so I’m not an esper in any way.”

“…”

Kamijou felt as if he had caught a glimpse of why Thor had risked so much to rescue Fräulein Kreutune.

She was similar but different.

She was in a position he could have ended up in.

She had not looked like a stranger to him, so he had made an enemy of every side involved to rescue her.

That may have been why he had gotten so angry when Kamijou had been indecisive about rescuing her.

However…

“What you’re doing is on a huge scale. Moving the entire world is so far out of the ordinary that ‘almighty’ might be right on the mark. But the actual life-size phenomenon should be no different from teleportation. You can’t accomplish this level of accuracy like that.”

“Stop it. I don’t like being praised like that. You saw Othinus at full power, didn’t you? If the predicted specs I calculated out are accurate, her power would go well beyond mine which is limited to the world we’re in now. How many times was the world destroyed on your way here? In fact, how’d you even defeat her when she had her lance? …No, merely winning in a fistfight wouldn’t get you back to this world.”

It was true that 100% Almighty Thor would likely be killed in an instant if he faced 100% Magic God Othinus. Thor ruled a single world while Othinus created infinite worlds. That was an obvious and insurmountable wall.

But that was not the current problem.

Almighty Thor stood before Kamijou as a real threat and Othinus could no longer use her power. To move on, Kamijou would have to defeat him with the fists of a puny human.

“Just to be clear, I don’t designate the coordinates. For one thing, coordinates on paper are meaningless in an ever-expanding universe.”

“…?”

“The condition isn’t to always move into your blind spot either. That’d only be around Level 3 in Academy City, right? Embarrassingly enough, I’m known as an almighty god, so use a little more imagination.”

“……It can’t be.”

The idea made Kamijou forget about the intense pain filling his entire body.

That effect would be convenient, unfair, hopeless, and exactly what a god would do.

“Does your spell *always move you to the point that will let you win*?”

“Well done. It’s technically the world that moves, though.”

Thor had already disappeared.

A dull shock ran through the center of Kamijou’s chest.

Part 4

How many times had he felt his fists smash into flesh and blood?

How many times had he watched the boy roll through the deep snow?

He heard a train’s wheels striking the track in the distance.

The next thing Thor knew, they had moved away from Egeskov Castle. Were they a few dozen meters away or a few hundred meters? He turned around, but the castle had vanished in the white scenery. Kamijou Touma’s repeated and futile attempts to move

away and the countless blows knocking him through the snow had added up to that simple result.

He had lost sight of Othinus, but that was not a problem for an almighty god.

The concept of distance was meaningless to him.

If necessary, the world would adjust for him. As long as she was on the planet *that he held in his hand*, he could instantly arrive in front of her even if she had fled to the other side of the world. Although technically, she would be arriving right in front of him.

"…"

This magic automatically adjusted position and distance so he only had to swing his arm or leg to land a clean hit. This spell produced the conditions needed for none of his opponent's attacks to reach him and for only him to attack.

A win or a draw were the only options.

Almighty Thor could always avoid defeat, so not even Academy City's #1 Level 5 could kill him. Without the ability to destroy and remake the entire world in an instant as Magic God Othinus had done, he could not be killed.

When a god died, so did the world.

Thor let out a sigh as he watched Kamijou struggle to his feet and take shaky steps away from him.

That action was meaningless. Distance and angle would be automatically readjusted.

"Are you done already?" he asked casually while taking a step forward.

With his powers as an almighty god released, that action seemed empty and dreary. It felt like unreal effort as if he were walking on a treadmill with a false, backwards-panning scenery displayed around him.

If it felt like this for him while he was limited to this world, he wondered how the world had appeared to Othinus when she had gained her full power.

"This is all I have. From beginning to end, it's nothing but this. With Mjölnir's support, I can add in the fusion blades and make it a little more acrobatic, but this is all I have now. To be blunt, this is your chance. You'll never have a better opportunity."

Even with that incomplete power, he had fought over one hundred Gremlin members and defeated them all unscathed. Even if he enjoyed attacking at his enemy's weak points, he had still been taking on almost the entire organization that had caused so much chaos in the world.

“If you have so much power, what did you want from Othinus?” asked Kamijou as he moved further backwards. “I can’t imagine you relying on anything. In fact, did you even need to join Gremlin?”

“Remember what I said before? No matter how high you go, there’s always someone higher. The pursuit of power never ends. I’m not all that different from the rest of Gremlin. I joined them in order to grant my desire. There was nothing more to it than that.”

Thor smiled while lightly clenching his fist.

“We may have officially wanted to destroy the science side’s victory during World War III, but that was only one of our many desires. Gremlin was an organization to allow Magic God Othinus to perfect her power and have her grant our desires with that power. That’s why everyone’s so pissed. Othinus ran off without paying us for our work.”

The Magic God Othinus that Kamijou had seen in that infinite hell could have accomplished that.

In fact, she most likely had done it in that perfect world where everyone was happy.

Kamijou had been the one to destroy their dreams and Othinus had been the one to return the world to normal.

“They all had similar complaints, so it would’ve been disgraceful to cause a giant fuss all together, don’t you think? That’s why I brought them all together. Just to be clear, I’ll be killing Othinus. I’ve got nothing against having a nice refreshing fistfight with you here, but a definite tragedy comes afterwards.”

Othinus had not made an enemy of the world on her own.

Every member of Gremlin had rejected the world and relied on the unique possibility of the magic god. They had followed her orders at the risk of being ostracized by the great gears of the world.

For that reason, they might be warranted in holding a grudge against Othinus after she stepped down from the stage.

But after thinking that far through it, Kamijou spat out some words.

“Are you kidding me?”

“Oh? I see the fire hasn’t left your eyes. That doesn’t make up for what she’s done, though.”

“You were in a position to stop it. You knew Othinus before Gremlin did all that and before you made an enemy of the world!!”

Magic God Othinus had truly been a frightening person.

She had created the lance on her own. To prevent her plan from being found out, she had prepared a dummy plan, caused major incidents around the world, and finally destroyed and recreated the world millions or even billions of times. Without exaggeration, that was the greatest evil he had seen up to this point.

"I stopped Othinus. I can't exactly say I 'defeated' her, but I still stopped her. That wasn't something only I could do. If you had tried to get to know her… If you had truly tried, anyone could have done it!! And yet…!!"

But that was not all.

She had returned everything to normal to protect Kamijou's dream even if it meant abandoning her own dream. She had saved him, knowing it would lead the entire world to attack her. Even when Index, Mikoto, and the others had let loose fierce attacks, she had accepted it head on without even trying to defend or evade.

"You gave up from the start! You gave up on understanding her!! You decided that was easier and you didn't want to risk falling victim to her anger, so you didn't truly try to face her and you made no attempt to speak with her!! …And now you're trying to put the whole blame on her? You gave up on making your own dreams come true, you forced those dreams on someone else, you turned a blind eye to the pressure that put on her, and now you're blaming her for failing!? To hell with that!! It shouldn't have been me standing by her side. It should have been all of you! There were fifty or even a hundred of you and yet not even one of you managed to reach this point, so stop trying to act like you're any better!!!"

They had been in contact with Othinus long before Kamijou had faced her, so why did they not understand?

Were they satisfied with simply throwing her into the category of "frightening magic god"?

Why hadn't they been able to find even one bit of good in her?

Why hadn't they found it odd that they did not find anything?

"Magic God Othinus was undoubtedly a villain," said Kamijou. "But you hold some responsibility for not stopping her! Don't run from your sins, Almighty Thor. This isn't some unrealistic expectation. I did it! I did what anyone could have but no one tried to do!! None of you managed, but that wasn't because it was impossible. It was simply because you had already given up on her!!"

Perhaps, thought Thor.

None of the Gremlin members, Thor included, had thought the words of a human would get through to Othinus. Even if she could understand the language, they had all thought she would not understand the human thoughts contained within the words.

In that way, Kamijou Touma had accomplished something unprecedented.

He may have been “stronger” than any of them.

However…

“That’s not the issue here, Kamijou-chan.”

Almighty Thor vanished.

He had already secured the position that would allow him to defeat the boy.

Part 5

No matter what, Almighty Thor could evade any and all attacks. In his battle with Kamijou, the entire world would automatically move in order to position him such that he evaded all of the attacks and could most effectively attack. All he had to do was swing his arm or leg. As if playing a dumbed-down fighting game in which smashing a single button would provide a flawless victory, he could always achieve victory if he spent enough time on it. It did not matter what his opponent did. Just hitting that same button would overcome it all.

This made him undeniably invincible and yet it made the fight unimaginably empty.

Even after thousands or tens of thousands of victories, he would obtain nothing.

If he used that almighty power too much, the information on the rotation and revolution of the earth would become irreversibly skewed like a video tape that had been redubbed again and again. He was taking such a huge risk, yet this victory would not give him even the slightest hint of knowledge.

This was why he so desperately sought battle experience points. If he had known Kamijou had opposed Magic God Othinus in that infinite world by repeatedly dying and learning, he might have clapped his hands and laughed uproariously.

(I thought I could escape this with you as my opponent.)

He felt a dull sensation pass through his fist.

By the time the positioning was complete (and he seemed to disappear to others), the attack was already over. Once he vanished it was too late to evade and moving before he disappeared was meaningless.

(I wouldn't be able to do a thing to Othinus at full power and the other members were too weak to gain anything. I'd thought you were at a nice spot *between the two*, dammit!!)

He heard a clanking sound.

He did not know how much longer he had to keep hitting the "button", but there was no way for Kamijou to escape the situation. Thor realized he was on the path to victory and that realization cooled his heart. The fact that he would gain nothing no matter what he did brought a dead look to his eyes.

The clanking sound grew louder.

"…?"

Only then did he finally catch on, but it was already too late.

He was no longer standing on the snowy ground. A hard railroad tie lay underfoot and he stood on a railroad track. He had punched Kamijou from behind and caused his body to bend like a bow, but the boy looked over his shoulder and still had life in his eyes.

"Your magic moves the world to put you in a position to win your fight with me, right?"

The will to fight remained in his eyes.

"Then can you handle *something unrelated to our fight*?"

"……"

After turning and looking at the approaching mass of steel, Thor froze in place.

An instant later, the 12-car freight train plowed through.

It passed by with tremendous speed while just barely grazing Kamijou's clothes.

Part 6

A deafening sound of scraping metal filled the air. The freight train was belatedly slamming on the brakes after hitting someone. Orange sparks flew from between the rails and metal wheels.

"…"

Kamijou Touma sank to the ground.

His entire body was battered and he could no longer distinguish the pain of one injury from another. He felt as if his body had expanded and was completely covered in the heat of pain. He did not know what had become of him on the inside and he was afraid of what a detailed examination would show. He was not even sure he had all of his bones and organs anymore.

Even so, it was not over yet.

Defeating Almighty Thor had not been his goal. Othinus had to take her eye from the lake and abandon her power.

Suddenly, a male voice spoke from the slight space between the bottom of the train and the ground.

“Hey.”

“Thor!!!???”

All of Kamijou’s hair stood on end. He had not been trying to kill Thor, but there was nothing else he could do if the boy could get up after that. That surprise attack would not work a second time.

Thor was covered in blood, but he appeared to be in one piece.

He had no special ability beyond freely twisting and moving the world, so his body was no sturdier than a normal person’s. That meant the freight train had not directly hit him.

He may have switched out his “target” at the last second, avoided a direct hit, and “fled” under the train.

“Oh, don’t worry. I’m not asking to continue the fight. That was a decent bit of experience. *Including the exchange of verbal blows.* I haven’t felt this great in a while.” Thor slowly waved a blood-soaked hand. “What are you two doing here in the first place? I could guess Othinus was hiding something here, but I don’t have a clue what.”

“She apparently gained her special power as a magic god by throwing her eye into the spring here. By retrieving it, she can abandon her power. Our goal is to have her surrender after that.”

“I see. Yeah, that really is like you, Kamijou-chan. But in that case, shouldn’t you hurry back there?”

“Is there still someone else?” asked Kamijou in annoyance.

However, Thor’s answer was certainly not what he had expected.

“You still haven’t caught on?”

“?”

“Your final enemy isn’t me. Anyone could figure it out if they gave it some thought.”

Part 7

At that moment, Magic God Othinus was kneeling next to the lake. Both her knees sank into the snow and her hands were placed on the freezing lake.

She muttered something under her breath.

The entire lake emitted a blinding blue light and it quickly condensed into a single point within the icy water she had scooped up in her hands. A sphere the size of a ping pong ball appeared in her hand, but it was very different from a human eye. The blue sphere was hard like a jewel. No matter how a human organ was preserved, it would not obtain that color. The invisible structure of a human and magic god may have been fundamentally different.

That was her eye.

By sacrificing her body part to the spring, she had gained the special body of a magic god. By placing it within the eye socket hidden by her eyepatch, she would return to the body she had before becoming a magic god.

That would save the world from the chaos produced by its fear of that great power.

If she then surrendered, the turmoil begun by her and Gremlin would come to an end.

However, she had a certain thought.

Words of rejection filled her mind.

(Is that really okay?)

The key to it all lay in her hands and it felt immensely heavy to her.

(Should I really be saved?)

She had watched the blood-soaked boy.

She had watched the boy as he became a shield against what she had wrought and as had continued to fight even as he literally coughed up blood.

He had fought his supposed allies, his injuries had grown one by one, and it had become hard to find a part of him that was *not* injured.

As she had watched him, the thought had come to her.

(Should I really be saved?)

After all, she had done so much and caused so much trouble for so many people.

After all, she had not made up for any of it and she had not asked anyone for forgiveness.

After all, her success was built on that boy's sacrifice and she had done nothing herself.

And yet…

If she were to ask him, she knew what his answer would be. Kamijou Touma, the one who understood her, would undoubtedly say she should be saved. But could she really cling to those words? Could she rely on him, lean on him, weigh him down, drag those words out of him as if it was normal, and ultimately say she had been saved?

Could she really entrust herself to that boy who would unconditionally save her?

Wasn't that the same as saying he was to blame for fact that she had been saved, that she had let herself be swept away by the events, and that she could not stop herself from overly relying on him?

She would be lying if she said she did not want to be saved.

After running all this way, she wanted to accomplish something rather than have it all end while leaving nothing behind. That was what she truly thought.

But…

Could she really cast that boy into the whirlpool of hatred?

Could she really let herself be saved while knowing he would have to bear her sins from then on as well?

Could she really use a trick to escape that truly painful journey and leave the blame for that injustice on this boy?

So she made up her mind.

"No…"

She heard a light sound as the blue jewel fell to her feet.

"*I just can't do it.*"

She covered her face with the hands cooled by the negative degree lake water and she gave a clear announcement as if groaning.

"*I can't save myself.*"

Part 8

A tremendous vibration attacked the entire area evenly.

"…"

Kamijou Touma hesitantly turned toward the center of the blast.

There, he found a familiar despair.

Ten wings seemed to fill the entire world. They looked like wings, but they were not. Those complex patterns that extended forever were the crossbows that acted as Magic God Othinus's final trump card. This was the ultimate weapon that not even Kamijou had known how to handle after somehow overcoming the lance in that infinite hell.

But Othinus could not use proper magic right now.

She was risking her life by forcing herself to use it.

"What is going on? I thought we came here to get rid of that power! I thought you were going to abandon your power as a magic god!! So why are you doing this?"

"You still don't get it?"

Something crawled out from under the train.

It was Thor who was just as blood-soaked as Kamijou.

"You're supposed to understand her, right? I don't know what happened on your way here, but you had to have seen it with her. She isn't alone and she has someone to rely on, but the more she relies on him, the more she hurts the one she cares for."

"…"

"When she held the lance, she might have been able to happily leave herself all alone without batting an eye. But what about now? You know a side of her that Gremlin doesn't, so you should understand."

He could not believe what he was hearing and the definitive statement soon stabbed into his ears.

“Othinus doesn’t want to be saved. She’s choosing to reject your salvation. She’s already seen what it means to save her, so she’s keeping you from bearing that sin in the future. If she dies while fighting you, she assumes it will cancel out what you’ve done.”

Othinus knew her body would be destroyed if she used any more magic.

Nevertheless, she had decided to use magic.

She was punishing herself.

She knew Kamijou Touma would try to stop her once he knew, so she was making sure to stop him.

She was silently saying that a monster like her should not seek salvation.

“Don’t…”

Kamijou understood what Othinus was doing.

He faced his final enemy and clenched his right fist with tremendous force.

“Don’t run, Othinus!!!!!”

He shouted with every last ounce of strength in his gut. He stood from the snow, clenched his fist, faced those ten dreadful crossbows, and let out a further cry.

“You were a horrible villain!! The entire world hated you!! You had a special power and deflecting all that hatred was a piece of cake!! You were born special and you crossed the point of no return when you threw your eye into that lake!! From that point on, there was nothing ‘normal’ or ‘average’ about you!! You didn’t fit in this world and there was no place for you here!! But!!”

He walked across the snowy field as he shouted.

He approached little by little.

The girl at the base of the ten crossbows had a glowing wound in the center of her chest and something like a stake was pierced through it. That was likely the fairy spell and cracks were spreading from there to every part of her body. An ominous creaking sound came from her and she looked like she had been dunked in liquid nitrogen and was about to break.

“Despite all that, you chose to face the world, Othinus! You decided to become ‘normal’ and ‘average’!! So don’t run. Don’t run from paying for your sins, Othinus!! Don’t turn your back on happiness!! That’s…That’s not humility and it’s not justice. You’re not saving anyone like this. You’re just running from a painful journey!!”

He had been unable to defeat this surefire attack in the very, very end.

This had taken his life.

He once more faced that true despair and he prepared his fist head on.

“What are you going to do?” asked Thor.

Most likely, not even that almighty god could escape this tremendous attack that was fired in exchange for her life. Thor would be no help here. No one in the world would.

“Isn’t it obvious?”

This fight was between Kamijou Touma and Magic God Othinus.

This was Kamijou’s homework that he had been unable to complete as he wanted back then.

“If she thinks it’s better for her to die, and if that ridiculous idea is giving her the mistaken impression that she’s saving me by running from that painful path…”

He thrust his fist forward as if once more issuing a challenge to this true god and that puny human boy made his announcement.

“Then I’ll destroy that illusion!!!!”

CHAPTER 20

V.S. “???”.

Round_12(Secret).

Part 1

In truth, Kamijou Touma and Almighty Thor were not the only ones watching that scene.

For example, a black cat that did not mew even once stared intently at it from the snow.

For example, an American UAV turned its inhuman camera toward it from 30,000 meters in the air.

For example, Amano Kaguya laughed from orbit even farther up.

♦

While wearing a white ghillie suit and lying in the snow, Sergeant Ingrid Martin focused on the information she was gathering via parabolic microphone.

She had heard “their” conversation.

After that, she asked for instructions over the radio.

“What should I do?”

“We’re trying to figure that out, too. Dammit, so this is how it turns out in the end.”

Most likely, the president on the other end of the radio did not have a proper grasp of the situation. The same went for Sergeant Ingrid. What were those things growing from the eyepatch girl’s back? Could anyone answer even that simple question?

“Can you continue to keep track of their conversation?” asked the president.

“There’s been a lot of static, but it should be possible.”

“I know this is a difficult request for you since you’re tasked with cross-borders operations.” The president paused for a moment. “But I want to declassify this footage. I want to show those two to the world as they are and I want to ask the world for forgiveness. Will you help me?”

Hearing that, she initially took a meaningless action. She tried to bring a hand to her forehead. If it was a request from the president, so it would be different from amateurishly uploading the footage to a video site. He would ask the world in a speech and he would take more of the blame than anyone on the actual scene. That was what he was asking.

“With all due respect, that would definitely harm your approval rating. Not to mention that these two are not American citizens.”

She knew it was useless, but she spoke anyway.

The response was exactly what she expected and it came with no delay.

“*So what?*”

She felt as if her vision were darkening, but an order was an order no matter how reckless it was. She had been given fewer jobs that left a bad taste in her mouth since he had become president and she decided this was a good way of thanking him.

And…

“Dahhh!! It looks like America’s made up their mind, so when is our boy going to show off his good side!? Make me wait any longer and I’ll be really mad! Really, really mad!!”

Something suddenly rose up three meters behind Sergeant Ingrid and let out a shout. Sergeant Ingrid drew her handgun in surprise, but she saw a nun wearing a red habit. It was amazing the woman had managed to hide in the pure white snow dressed like that.

Next to her was a girl in a habit that looked more like a bondage outfit.

“My question: do you have any faith at all?”

“What are you talking about, Sasha. The people in religious paintings are always beautiful, so justice lies in beauty.”

Next, a different patch of snow rose up.

A girl in what looked like a lacrosse uniform and with a tail-like object growing from under her miniskirt wiped snow from her head.

“Yes, yes. Everyone’s adorable Lessar is here. And who left this black cat here!? Does that mean you don’t need me? I want to eat tangerines and cheese fondue in a kotatsu, too!! Wearing skimpy clothing, of course!!”

Sergeant Ingrid was so overcome by confusion that she abandoned her mission and shouted out.

“Wh-what is all this!? When did all of you get so close!?”

“Oh, what’s with this failed local mascot costume? This is just the best spot for observing them. You were actually late to show up.”

“???”

The imp and the red nun looked perfectly at home. In her job, Sergeant Ingrid had fought with the special forces of various different nations, but their behavior was different from any of those.

The imp completely ignored her and contacted some other place.

“I see, I see. So what about England? Yeah, I suppose so. It seems France is talking about withdrawing as well and being the only country still fighting probably wouldn’t be a good idea. Then pass it on to the queen. It’d cause problems if an outlaw like me contacted her directly.”

Part 2

In the UN headquarters building in New York, United States President Roberto Katze rose from his seat.

“I’ll be holding an emergency press conference. What will all of you be doing?”

Queen Regnant Elizard waved a hand in annoyance.

“I’ll leave that to the people who want to stand out in public. I’ll handle the internal announcement. I’m especially worried about my military obsessed daughter who was so eager to get out there. Her mobile fortress was destroyed, so it isn’t going to be easy calming her down.”

“Ohhh? You’re not dead set on killing them anymore?”

“Please do not tease her too much.” The boy who held the position of Russian Orthodox Patriarch let out a heavy sigh. “I will focus on reaching those in places America’s voice cannot reach.”

“I can provide some assistance as far as that is concerned,” added the Roman pope.

That left France. As everyone’s focus turned to the unhealthy-looking Femme Fatale, she shrugged with a somehow triumphant look.

“France never sent anyone in the first place, so we have no reason to struggle now.”

“It seems one of this world’s problems is how the clever have a way of going unnoticed.”

As soon as Elizard spat out that comment, a small fight broke out.

Part 3

Someone spoke from a television in a warm living room far removed from the conflicts in the world.

“Today has been a day of trials. I can imagine a lot of people have been glued to their TVs and the internet to receive peace of mind as soon as possible. I would now like to ask you all a question.”

♦

The image of the president on a giant train station screen spoke quietly.

“Is Othinus, the leader of Gremlin, evil? No one would hesitate to answer that question. She is undoubtedly a villain. Tokyo, Baggage City, and even our own Hawaii. The scars she has caused are enough to determine what kind of person she is.”

♦

The passersby in front of the many electronics store televisions stopped for a moment.

“But is Othinus truly irredeemable?”

♦

Young soldiers in a Florida air force base stood in a line and listened to the speech.

“The people involved in these incidents or the people who have seen the scars they left may have a strong desire to punish her. I do not think they are wrong to feel that way. But is it right to strap someone to the electric chair if they truly regret their crimes and are attempting to save someone at the risk of their own life? I don’t know any complicated philosophy about good and evil. When I was inaugurated as president, I placed my hand

on the Bible as I made my oath, but I'm not a clergyman or an intellectual theologian. That's why I want to ask all of you."

♦

In a distant country, a spy under a false identity listened to the voice on the television while pretending not to recognize it.

"I'm sure there are some hearts that would be saved by taking harsh revenge. I'm sure there are other hearts that would be saved by giving her a single chance after all this hardship."

♦

Many people watched their LCD screens via satellite broadcast or video sharing sites.

"But what do you think?"

♦

The Russian Orthodox Patriarch spoke in front of many cameras.

"Othinus has indeed committed many sins, but is it truly in accordance with our beliefs to declare her 'irredeemable'? I would like to reconsider that question."

♦

An office worker watched the small television attached to his passenger plane seat.

"Some of the apostles initially denounced the Son of God, but when they came to regret their mistakes, the Son of God forgave them. We are being tested. Will we give in to our weak hatred or will we have the strength to forgive?"

♦

A young man watched his car navigation screen in his parked car.

"I want you to cast aside your preconceptions and look again with unclouded eyes. Look once more on that girl shedding tears. If she had done nothing, she might have been saved, but she cast aside that opportunity and brought further punishment on herself even if it destroys her body. And she has done so in order to save a single boy."

♦

On a cruise ship, an old man watched the television so intently he ignored the beautiful scenery outside the window.

“If there is any sin in that, it is the sin of so easily being swept to suicide. Our teachings are not kind enough to condone suicide. She must live on and make up for her sins. And once she has made up for those sins, I want her to be saved. By showing that even Othinus can be saved, I want to show the light to the many other people who are heading down the wrong path.”

♦

While waving for a passing helicopter to rescue him, a young man in Tokyo listened to the Roman pope on his cell phone’s 1seg broadcast.

“I believe there are many ways to resolve this. All we must do is choose one of those options.”

♦

A middle-aged worker used heavy equipment to remove the rubble from the remains of Baggage City and listened to the voice over the radio.

“Will we watch over the goodness budding within the evil that is Othinus? Or will we crush that bud of goodness along with the evil? If you place a hand on your heart and listen to the voice of truth, you will know which answer will not leave a bad taste in your mouth.”

♦

The soldiers on the snowy plains of Denmark held sniper rifles between head and shoulder, warmed their hands with mugs of coffee, listened to the broadcast, and looked up into the white sky.

“I believe Othinus is a mirror that reflects our own hearts. Giving into justifiable anger is simple and perhaps even enjoyable, but those who drown in it will learn the truth about themselves. Violence is still violence and it will be their own faces they see reflected in the mirror.”

♦

While continuing to hold off the British monsters one-against-three, Kanzaki Kaori spat blood to the snow and listened to Queen Regnant Elizard’s voice.

“Until now, killing Othinus was the only option we could think of, but a certain boy showed us a completely different way. As head of state, I wish to show my respect for that. It could not have been an easy path. He overcame anguish, doubt, fear, anger, and all sorts of other emotions to reach an answer that none of us could.”

♦

Second Princess Carissa was a step away from defeating the Amakusa Saint and she clicked her tongue at the voice.

“We lost, but not to Magic God Othinus’s power or that boy’s courage. Let’s all admit it: we surrendered to our own fear. As chaos filled the world, we were obsessed with the idea that killing was the best option. And now that we have admitted it, we must carry out the duty of the loser.”

♦

Tears had begun to fill Knight Leader’s eyes as he found himself unable to keep up with the two women whose faces contained ghastly expressions, but he finally breathed a sigh of relief.

“Dragon slaying is a great feat, but a great hero cannot save the dragon. That is what this boy has accomplished. Is it truly a good deed for a great hero to rush in and slay that dragon now? I do not think so. What about all of you?”

♦

William Orwell’s expression did not budge.

“If you have your answer, then pray. That boy has reached an answer that not even a great hero could, so pray that he will show us a sight we could not even imagine.”

♦

Kumokawa Maria listened to the president’s speech from a hospital room television.

The aftermath of fighting that was Kihara Kagun was no longer with her. As soon as Gremlin had scattered from Tokyo in all directions and the disturbance had come to an end, he had stopped moving.

“Will we kill the evil that is Othinus? Or will we forgive it?”

♦

Sleeping peacefully on the bed was a pregnant woman.

Fertility Goddess Freyja was one of the people “he” had tried to protect in the very end and Maria had taken over for him.

“Today, I would like to do one thing.”

♦

And in the end, United States President Roberto Katze finished his speech on televisions around the world.

“I would like to test the strength of humanity along with all of you.”

♦

The world creaked.

Massive power gathered in the ten crossbows.

The girl that was Magic God Othinus had rejected Kamijou Touma’s salvation.

And in exchange, she would die.

“Thor, get down.”

Kamijou would not hesitate any longer.

He clenched his fist until it was as hard as rock and spoke without turning back.

“A single hit from this would blow the planet away. I doubt even you would survive.”

He took a step into the snow.

As long as he could take that one step, he would make it. His feet would not stop. He walked, ran, and then dashed full speed through the snow.

He rushed toward Othinus.

He made his way to the girl who had put too much of a burden on herself and was about to break apart.

“Othinus!!”

The eyepatch girl faced him with her one eye.

The other eye was still not inside her eye socket and the cracks continued to spread through her body. Even if he was going to do something about the eye, he had to stop those crossbows first. She had lost her lance, so the source of her power as a magic god was the fairy spell wound in her chest.

That was the trump card against magic gods that Ollerus had developed.

But it was magic, so his right hand would be able to destroy it.

"..."

Meanwhile, she held out her slender hand.

Her index finger pointed at the boy.

She had finished targeting him.

Next, she would fire.

The ten embodiments of destruction rushed out all at once.

To the boy named Kamijou Touma that was an absolute wall. It was death itself. It had truly and completely killed him once in the past. Just as all living creatures could not oppose their own lifespans, that great firepower was the ending point for him.

(I won't let myself lose here.)

However, he did not look away and he charged straight forward.

This time, he would overcome it.

He was determined to.

(There's no reason to give up after coming this far!!)

The sound arrived after a short delay.

One beam of concentrated destruction shot by his side. He had not avoided it with his athletic ability. It had been an intentional sacrificial pawn meant to restrict his possible routes. In that infinite hell, it had been the final shot that killed him.

He understood that, but he continued to run.

More arrows raced past him and they all narrowed his range of motion. His freedom was reduced and his death approached, but he still ran with all his strength. Each time an arrow was fired, the cracks crawling along Othinus's skin would have an explosion of growth. He could not allow that to happen no matter what, so he ran. He forced down the fear to reach her as quickly as possible.

In that hell one step away from death, his eyes met with hers.

She had a slight smile on her face.

It was the same smile she had given when silently accepting Index, Mikoto, and the others' attacks on Sargasso. It was as if she were saying everything was returning to its proper position.

(That's not what this is.)

The destruction of Othinus continued and her body inexorably crumbled.

"To hell with this!! You brought me back to life, returned everything to normal, and saved me! You understood what a small piece of happiness was!! You can't possibly think it's right to sacrifice yourself like this!!"

The god's answer was to fight back.

The death that invited him in took clear form and assaulted him head on.

(Ahh.)

He could not evade it now.

The previous arrows had guided him and worn down his freedom of movement. Even if this was an open area of land, it felt no different from a straight and narrow tunnel and a final attack seemed to fill that entire tunnel.

This was unavoidable death.

As he watched it approach, he had a sudden thought about when he had died before.

(Come to think of it, I never tried this back then.)

He clenched his right fist.

He could not evade, so that left only one option.

His right fist clashed head on with the magic god's arrow.

In the instant of impact, he realized he had failed.

An ominous noise passed through his arm. Imagine Breaker was not enough to completely destroy this attack and he could feel his arm being pushed back.

(I don't care if it gets broken, crushed, or ripped apart! As long as it isn't torn off, I can still negate the stake in her chest!!)

He swung up his right arm that had become a spiral of intense pain.

With a sound like a rubber band snapping after being stretched beyond its limit, the arrow's trajectory was diverted slightly upwards and he slipped below it.

The girl's surprised face lay before him.

"I win, Othinus!!!!!"

He had made his way up to her, but he did not clench his fist as he moved his red-stained arm. Rather than punching, he embraced her slender body in both arms.

He wrapped his arms behind her and his palm touched the stake of light piercing through the center of her chest.

He gathered his last strength in those five fingers.

"Aaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!!"

And he pulled it out from her back.

"I won't let you run away," he whispered in her ear.

His body was completely battered, but he still gathered strength in his fingers.

That was enough to smash the stake of light to pieces.

"I promised, remember? I said I would save you even if it meant fighting the entire world."

"Yes…you did."

Othinus narrowed her eye as the boy held her in his arms.

She looked happy.

She looked truly happy.

"But you don't have to worry."

He heard a cracking noise.

It was a very quiet noise.

"I was…"

But it did not stop and it did not come to an end. As the sound of thin ice breaking continued from her body, the blonde girl in an eyepatch smiled.

"I was already saved from the moment you said that to me."

He saw light.

He saw particles of light.

By the time he noticed the change, he could no longer feel the girl in his arms. Her slender body crumbled. He could not understand it. Her crumbling body was more fleeting than snow. It turned to smooth particles of light as it fell to the ground and those were swept away by the wind.

He had been one step – just one step – too late, and in that moment, he thought he heard her voice once more even after she had vanished.

“Thank you.”

Before he could determine whether that voice had been real or imagined, something within him reached its limit and he collapsed onto the snow.

EPILOGUE

What does the Right Hand Grasp After the Fighting?

Finale_∞.

"Yes. If we were to interfere, would this be the time?"

It may have been wrong to refer to that place as dark. In fact, the word "place" was not entirely accurate either. Non-existent things could not be explained. Nevertheless, a few voices lurked within where no one could interfere.

"We have no more attachment to Othinus herself, but this ending could hinder Kamijou Touma's future. Then again, I doubt anyone but us could resolve this now that a magic god is involved. It would be a shame to have the direction thrown off so much for something so trivial."

"High Priest[1], we're thinking about influencing events by interfering with the existing world, aren't we?"

"Don't worry, Nephthys. The old man isn't so foolish he wouldn't calculate all that out. This shows just how different an existence Othinus was. Although I doubt she realized the truth behind Gremlin."

"Othinus was a failure."

"She reached the level of magic god, so there is no reason to be that cruel."

"High Priest, you're as kind as ever when it comes to judging others. If it didn't come from looking down on everyone, you might have actually achieved enlightenment."

"Nephthys, we are all lacking in some way. Othinus was remarkable yet went a bit too far, but that is just the kind of person Gremlin gathers."

"Gremlin, the name of a plain fairy that is not dyed in the colors of any existing religion."

[1] The original term refers to a Buddhist high priest.

“Instead of being a fusion of science and magic, it’s an organization that every magic god of every religion can take part in equally☆”

“Oh, Niang-Niang. Where have you been?”

“The concepts of distance and time don’t matter here, remember? And I can’t leave regardless. Even if I did, I’d just end up gathering unwanted attention on a global scale like Othinus. I was a hair’s breadth and an infinite distance away.”

“Does the same go for the others?”

“Old man, did you start forgetting things once you became a mummy? The zombie girl, the chimera, and everyone are here. It’s just in destiny’s hands whether we run across each other in this place where the tiniest gap extends to an infinite distance☆”

“If you think about it, you could call this our way of being ecological. We do it because the world is too small for us to live in, but it isn’t easy putting up with being here.”

“That’s why I’m so mad at Othinus for being so selfish☆”

“Yes, but the strength of the world was enough to withstand everything she did. It will not have any real effect on the situation.”

“Then can we continue as planned?”

“Most definitely, Nephthys. The High Priest has just corrected the disorder caused by Othinus. From here on, Gremlin will show its true value.”

The conversation came to an end. In that place that did not exist in the world, they prepared to scatter apart.

But something happened a moment before they could.

“Hello there. I’ve finally found you, Gremlin.”

The darkness audibly split apart.

An external power caused a vertical tear.

Othinus and Kamijou Touma had been wrong about one thing.

They had thought that world of darkness had been the full extent of the world. They had assumed that pitch black despair had been the product of destroying everything and leaving nothing at all behind.

But in truth, there had been one more layer. It was as uniform as a thin membrane, it had not even the slightest seam, and it could not be detected or destroyed by anyone, but one last phase had existed.

This black world was the place not even Magic God Othinus had been able to destroy.

“Oh?”

“Someone” narrowed their eyes at the intense white light from outside.

That “someone” watched as the perpetrator set foot in that divine territory.

“I had noticed you had not shown yourself recently, but I see you were busy with a touching side job.”

The hoarse voice went on to speak a somehow nostalgic name.

“*Aleister Crowley the Human.*”

This magician had silver hair that reached his ankles and wore a green hospital gown. That human looked both male and female, both childlike and aged, and both saintly and sinful. His expression as he answered could have been interpreted as any number of emotions.

“Letting Othinus run free would have been a problem, but I left that to the strength of the world. The world was temporarily led to destruction as a result, but I still had to prioritize this. It wasn’t easy converting coordinates filled with non-existent numbers into decimal.”

Their safe territory was gone.

They would now be thrown out into the existing world and pursued by the people who lived there.

“Someone” spoke after calculating out how much this truth would influence their plans.

This “someone” spoke with a graceful voice.

“Your attempt to destroy magic is quite eccentric as well. If you had turned that obsession in the right direction, you could have been a part of Gremlin too.”

“I made some adjustments to myself to ensure that would not happen. That way I can control something different than you bizarre magicians who can only live in a distorted phase.”

“I see,” replied “someone” with a hoarse voice. “I am only an outsider, but is science really wonderful enough to indulge yourself in to that extent?”

“None of you would understand even if you spent eternity trying.”

“Oh? *And this has nothing to do with the single remaining tearstain in your journal?*”

“……”

All expression vanished from the face of the human known as Crowley.

He held a twisted silver staff in his hand and his lips carried a single name.

Beast666.

That name had once been used by the man who led the world’s most famous modern Western magic cabal to destruction from within.

“You really are human. I’m a little jealous of that emotion, but that isn’t enough. I am about to tie it all together, so could you stick around a little longer?”

“Oh, you’re gonna tell him about that☆” said a girl’s voice with a giggle.

“This is about Aiwass, that cornerstone of your plan that you went to such great lengths to raise.”

The old man’s voice contained a cruelty unfitting to his age.

Far from reaching enlightenment, desire dripped from his words like juice from a thick cut of meat.

“It’s a complete failure, young one. You’re going to be at your wits’ end before long.”

A moment later, a clash occurred somewhere in the world.

♦

When Kamijou Touma awoke, he was not in a Danish hospital surrounded by a foreign language. He was in the usual Academy City hospital room. He had a feeling the fact that he could call it the “usual” hospital room was a problem, but he felt as comfortable waking up here as he did in his student dorm.

“…”

He opened his eyes but could barely move his body and could feel bandages wrapped around him. He gathered all his strength to bring his right hand in front of his face, but the movement was restricted by an IV, a blood transfusion tube, and electrode cords. His elbow and most of the rest of his arm looked like it was covered in as many cords as a computer.

“Wait. Should you really be pumping so much stuff into me? That all looks disturbingly colorful! I don’t think they give you this much at once even in the great supplement nation of America!”

The frog-faced doctor entered after hearing the ruckus and gave an explanation.

“You should be more worried about your body that was in such a bad state that you wouldn’t have survived without taking these kinds of inhuman measures.”

“I already know that doctors say extreme things on the first day in the hospital to scare their patients. I saw it on a documentary! I won’t let you trick me like you’re training a dog!!”

“Well, I won’t stop you from thinking that if you want.”

“Eh? That was surprisingly dry… Ehh? Really? I really wouldn’t have survived without all this? I was wrong! A doctor that won’t say anything is the scariest!!”

“Healthy enough to shout: check. Okay, I think I can allow visitors now.”

With that, the frog doctor quickly left the hospital room and taught Kamijou just how frightening an unhelpful doctor could be.

Just as he left, someone else entered.

The first visitor was Index, that girl in a white nun’s habit with gold embroidery. Even in the hospital, she had a calico cat on her head.

“Touma,” she said as soon as she entered. “I think you have something to say to me.”

“Okay, let’s start by creating a comfortable atmosphere for conversation by not showing off our canine teeth like that.”

“Touma, I seriously look down on people who don’t say ‘thank you’ and ‘I’m sorry’.”

“I would absolutely love to bow down to you in apology, but I can’t move with all of this on me!!”

As he struggled to move on the bed, he was as awkward as a battery-powered teddy bear that had been hit about three times with a hammer.

Index’s expression clouded over when she saw the bandages covering his right arm from shoulder to fingers.

“Are you okay, Touma?”

“*I* am.”

He fell silent as he too looked at his arm that had appeared from under the blanket.

“But I couldn’t do anything about Othinus. I think the cracks had already spread too far by the time she rejected being saved and started that final battle. No matter what I did with my right hand, it wouldn’t have changed the result.”

“…Touma.”

“What does it even mean to save someone?” Kamijou gathered some strength in his barely moving right hand. “She was smiling. Just before she fell to pieces, she was definitely smiling. Even with the way it ended and even with the hellish process leading up to it, she said she had already been saved. She smiled and said that had saved her.”

He did not think saving people was a simple matter, but he was still having trouble grasping the meaning of Othinus’s final smile.

Could he really view that as saving her?

Did it count as saving someone as long as they were smiling? Could an action that went against someone’s wishes be called saving them?

“Maybe I was too presumptuous to think I could save someone.”

His right hand could only destroy.

It was the opposite of the magic god that could create.

In that infinite hell, he had thought that was more than enough.

“But I wanted to see that smile in a different way. That’s all I wanted.”

Was that simply his own selfishness?

Was it not about saving or not saving? Was it about what he personally viewed as good or bad?

Whatever the case, that was what he legitimately thought.

Othinus had wished for and accepted her death and vanished from the world.

A bitter feeling ran through his chest, but he would have to accept it as fact and continue on.

He remained behind, so he had to live out the rest of his life.

But then…

“Hey, is it just me or are you acting like I’m dead?”

A familiar voice suddenly reached him and a small figure poked out from under his pillow.

The girl was only about fifteen centimeters tall, but her identity was plain as day.

“Othinus!? But…how!?”

“How? You were part of the reason.”

The palm-sized Othinus lay down next to his head.

“First, I had yet to put in the eye and was thus essentially a magic god and not a human. Second, you destroyed the fairy spell with Imagine Breaker before I fired the final crossbow shot, so I was not completely destroyed. Third, having her body crumble was not enough to kill a magic god.”

His mind could not keep up with the sudden explanation.

He immediately looked over to Index, but her eyes were opened wide too. Her 103,000 grimoires only had the knowledge needed to make a magic god out of a human, so they may not have included what would happen afterwards.

Othinus waved her index finger while lying face down.

“At that point, Magic God Othinus was 99% destroyed, but it seems the remaining pieces gathered together on their own. My body changed form somewhat and I can no longer use my former power, but it seems I have remained behind.”

It was absolutely ridiculous.

The idea of a human gathering together again after being smashed to pieces sounded like complete nonsense, but he could not question it further when he was talking about a magic god. If Othinus said that was how it worked, he could only accept it.

In fact, he himself had seen it happen before.

In that infinite hell, she had hidden the final crossbow shot behind herself and pulverized her own body along with his, but her body had soon regenerated as if nothing had happened.

(But would my body “automatically” re-form with no intervention from my will? I still have my questions about that.)

The small Othinus stared off into the distance, but Kamijou had a completely different question.

“So…can I touch you with my right hand like this?”

“Wha-!? Were you planning to touch me all over without warning me?”

“That isn’t what I meant! And stop snapping your teeth tougher like a bear trap, Index! With precedents like Kazakiri, I want to avoid having you vanish the instant I touch you with my right hand!!”

“There was no problem when you touched me as a neutral magic god. I can’t say for sure as we haven’t tested it, but my basic properties shouldn’t have changed with the downgrade in size.”

“I see…”

At that point, his brain finally caught up to reality.

Othinus was right in front of him. He could speak with her once more. As he thought about that simple and basic fact, he was not sure what expression was on his face.

At any rate, he repeated himself once more as if letting out what had gathered in his chest.

“I see.”

“Hmph.”

Othinus averted her gaze a bit, but another question entered his mind.

“Wait. Weren’t you supposed to be punished? You were supposed to be in an American prison, but did you get that changed to Academy City?”

“About that…”

She trailed off.

The cat on Index’s head had been slowly waving its tail in great interest, and it suddenly jumped onto the hospital bed.

More accurately, it jumped toward Othinus whose short form with glittering blonde hair looked like a lure.

Magic God Othinus had truly destroyed the world and repeatedly remade it as she saw fit, but she now felt all her hair stand on end next to the pillow.

“Wait…Y-you idiot!! This combination just isn’t right! I don’t know of any myths involving a one-eyed god being eaten by a cat, but… How about you stop staring and actually help me!?”

“I’d love to help, but does Robot Dance Kamijou look like he can do anything that skillful?”

The inevitable scream filled the hospital room.

♦

Looking like a stolen fish held in the stuffed animal-like cat’s mouth, the fifteen centimeter Othinus stared into the distance.

She pictured the conversation that had occurred in Denmark after Kamijou Touma had fully lost consciousness.

She had spoken with the president and Queen Regnant via a radio thrown over by a soldier in a white ghillie suit.

“Looking like that, there would be no way to keep you from breaking out of an American prison. If you straighten your back, you’re only about fifteen centimeters, right? You could slip through the bars or even the food slot. If you abandoned your pride, you might even be able to escape by flushing yourself down the toilet. There’s no point in throwing you into even a maximum security prison.”

Once the president was finished, the Queen Regnant spoke.

“Even if your form and the total amount of power contained within it have changed, you are still closer to being a magic god than a human. You have been weakened too far to ever use magic again, though. To be blunt, do you even have a lifespan? If throwing you into a cell for a hundred years wouldn’t add a single wrinkle, imprisonment won’t accomplish anything. We need to create a new punishment that will be especially effective against you and only you.”

They were not her friends or her comrades in arms.

They had coolly analyzed her actions and they dryly gave their answer.

“You must forever watch the world of happiness you went as far as suicide to look away from. That is the greatest punishment humanity can give you now that we have achieved victory over a magic god.”

AFTERWORD

If you bought each volume one by one, welcome back. If you bought them all at once, welcome.

This is Kamachi Kazuma.

We've finally reached the tenth volume since the New Testament label was added. As mentioned in the previous volume's afterword, this had the highly irregular three-part structure, but I thought it would make a good ending to settle everything with Othinus.

"I will protect you even if I make an enemy of the world." Such a hackneyed, overused, and unarguably cool phrase. This volume's theme was trying it out for real.

That made this volume about a boss rush. I focused on breaking through the center of a true hell in a world with no redos and on Kamijou Touma taking his revenge after doing nothing but lose in the New Testament series. With Marian's Dáinsleif, Almighty Thor after he broke from the shell of the lightning god, and Magic God Othinus's crossbow that once took the life of the protagonist, I added in everything I could that had been built up in New Testament.

In New Testament 9, Kamijou Touma learned he was not a hero of justice but a normal high school boy, but in this volume, I wanted to show that being a normal high school boy doesn't mean he can't challenge the world.

Even as he shivers in the cold, is soaked in blood, and exchanges blows with the allies he had previously relied on, the protagonist continues to fight for a single girl. How did you like it?

- **Chapter 9: V.S. "The One who Bears White and Black Wings and Opposes the World" — Round_01.**

When you hear the term "boss rush", you might think the enemies will gradually grow stronger at each new stage, so I immediately sent in one of the strongest. I even showed a superweapon hidden in the shadow of Endymion to make even his entrance exciting.

I also immediately used the badly damaging attack method of using the left hand to swing a weapon on top of the right hand to show that this would be a truly hellish boss rush.

I quite like Amano Kaguya who is neither good nor evil and views the earth's events from an outsider's perspective, but I'm not sure I'll ever have a chance to really use that in a story.

- **Chapter 10: V.S. "The Fury of Two Billion" — Round_02.**

After Academy City's #1 comes the Agnese Force. I figured that sequence would have you laughing and asking what Agnese could possibly do, so I used the surging inflation spell that multiplies personal magic by two billion to quickly corner Kamijou.

My main purpose was to show at an early stage that letting your guard down for an instant would get you killed this time. Or to put it more simply, I wanted to write a scene of Kamijou spinning through the air and dislocating his shoulder!

- **Chapter 11: V.S. "The Nuns Wavering in God's Majesty" — Round_03.**

Now for the Russian Orthodox Church. Their power aside, the important point with them was being the first opponent in the boss rush that Kamijou barely knew and thus would show no kindness.

The Seven Deadly Sins spell they used is meant to weaken pagan gods by defining them by one's own set of rules, so it is a lot like Ollerus's fairy spell. However, the Seven Deadly Sins spell would probably tend more in the demon direction (Their power is looked down on, but they remain a symbol of fear. In some cases, they become seen as an even greater force.), so it might have led to Othinus retaining her powers and gaining an even crueler personality.

- **Chapter 12: V.S. "The Four Demon-Slaying Swords" — Round_04.**

After the Romans and Russians, it's the Anglicans. The last of the three Christian groups has the most vertical freedom. Regardless of his right hand, Kamijou Touma fundamentally cannot defeat a Saint, so he chose the frightening tactic of taking the path with a 100% chance of death.

The difference between him and Bersi is that he (in a way) completely trusts Kanzaki Kaori. The most important point is how the Priestess looks somehow happy even as watching spoiled Kamijou throws off her pace.

- **Chapter 13: V.S. “The Blacksmith who Releases the Magic Sword” — Round_05.**

Dáinsleif was never truly used in New Testament 4, but now it attacks at its full specs. Partially calling in all sorts of hells and endings seems like complete inflation of power to me, but I decided to go for it anyways because the dwindling of people’s faith acts as a sign or omen of coming destruction in a lot of religions.

By the way, as I wrote this, it scared me how quickly the user would run out of their stock of summons when using this attack.

And if Marian had not made a limited barrier before the battle, something similar to Angel Fall in the old Volume 4 might have happened.

- **Chapter 14: V.S. “The Police of the Front Stage” — Round_06.**

The opponent Kamijou Touma completely lost to was not a monster from the magic or science sides. It was a normal soldier who had gathered as much normal power as possible. This functions as an important brake in this series. If he can ever defeat someone like that without thinking, the series is as good as over.

The ghillie suit is a truly terrible combination from a moe perspective and it’s a pain to describe in detail, but I really wanted to put one in somewhere!

Sergeant Ingrid’s sneaking was partially a way of showing how skilled she was, but then it was made fun of by Lessar and Vasilisa later. That is another important balancer in this series.

- **Chapter 15: V.S. “The Merciless Scientific Vanguard” — Round_07.**

The rush of Five Overs. There was no way he could win, so I made some drama as they ran away. The theme of this chapter was a reckless elopement. I was trying to make the hopeless situation seem as refreshing as possible by bringing up far-off dreams such as the bakery and flower shop.

- **Chapter 16: V.S. “The Heaven-Sent Child Loved by Electrons” — Round_08.**

In a way, this was another revenge match from New Testament 9, but this time it happened with Kamijou losing.

The main point here was Mikoto defeating Kamijou's argument with a similar yet different argument to the Will's in the previous volume. The gist of it was "from whose perspective is it a perfect world?"

Kamijou could only overcome the ultimate argument with his selfish desires, but Mikoto saved him in a different way than the Will by pointing out that everyone else has their own selfish desires and it's too simple to think mechanically forcing salvation on everyone is the best option.

By the way, the final attack was because I decided to go with a "special attack hidden behind seemingly kind and accepting behavior" similar to rubbing their head and exploding, kissing them on the forehead and exploding, or hugging them and exploding.

- **Chapter 17: V.S. "The Master of the Library and the Magic Queen" — Round_09.**

Kamijou Touma's tension lessens the closer his relationship with the person is and that showed its true value here. …I just wish there had been a character there to make fun of Birdway for loving her big bro so much!!

And since I was making Birdway into a pseudo magic god, I kind of regret not giving her the costume along with the lance.

- **Chapter 18: V.S. "The One who Opposes the Magic God" — Round_10.**

As any reader who has made it this far could probably guess, getting off easy for two or three battles is a sign of things are about to get much worse. This time it was Silvia going yandere after Ollerus's defeat. She went all out with breaking a large tree through his body and throwing over the bag of blood he had become to restrict the actions of her partner. She was so angry that she went for hand-to-hand while completely ignoring her well-reasoned spell using a clothesline shown in New Testament 6. She likely wanted to feel the sensation of his flesh being smashed to fulfill her desire for revenge.

On the other hand, Brunhild was (scarily) calm. Kamijou and Othinus gave up on talking right away, but she is the type who can be reasoned with. If they had persuaded her, the battle may have developed in a different direction.

If Kamijou is the current one who understands Othinus, then Ollerus is the one who best knows her past evil deeds that are wrapped in mystery. First she took his chance to reach the level of magic god and then she took the special power remaining in his body. Othinus had twice taken everything from him, so I thought him forgiving her would hold an important point in this story.

Ollerus had lost all his power, but I made sure he did not let that weakness show. The important point is how lonely he is as the one who could not understand her.

- **Chapter 19: V.S. "The Hammer-Wielding Almighty God" — Round_11.**

Almighty Thor defeated Kamijou in an instant at the end of New Testament 6, so I think this was an important revenge match for him to overcome.

He said not to view his ability as mere teleportation, but Musujime Awaki might be able to do something similar in her perfect mode. It isn't for nothing that she was determined to reach Level 5 if not for her trauma.

Thor looked up to Kamijou Touma not for the power in his right hand but for the environment he is placed in and how bravely he chooses to throw himself into that environment. Thor automatically evades all attacks and takes the optimal position, but that means he must abandon the weak and his allies and only he can hide in safety if something happens. With all that and his conflict with "brooding" Touma in New Testament 5 and 6, it hints that what he truly longs for is not the strongest sword but the strongest shield.

Kamijou became a "battered shield" after he made decisions that anyone could have made if they thought about it and ultimately made an enemy of the world to save a lonely goddess. To Thor, he may have looked like a giant mountain after gradually gathering up all of those experience points. To that "obsessed mountain climber", he must have looked like the greatest peak.

- **Chapter 20: V.S. "???" — Round_12(Secret).**

In that cold world where everyone had announced they would kill Othinus, who would the final enemy be? After a lot of thought, I decided on Magic God Othinus herself rather than some other murderous person.

She decided a monster like herself should not be saved.

To Kamijou Touma who wanted to save that girl no matter what, no other enemy could have been as powerful. And when she became his enemy and rejected salvation, there was a line I definitely wanted to have him say: Don't run, Othinus.

That isn't a line you would normally hear from a protagonist to a girl who is almost entirely cornered, but Kamijou himself chose suicide in New Testament 9. Because he knew how she felt all too well and because he understood her, he was able to speak more harshly. I thought that would express their strong bond better than some flowery words.

With Othinus as his enemy, the final barrier he had to overcome was of course the crossbow. He was only able to be pushed onwards in New Testament 9, so I wrote this while thinking he could only stand on his own once he overcame this attack.

Also, the president's speech was exciting, wasn't it!? A bit sad that it would be changed to a headmaster or board chairman's speech in a school story.

Speaking of the speech, I used it to stretch out the beginning of the fight because a drawn out battle against the crossbow was impossible. I was trying to make it like a duel in a Western or jidaigeki. That's also why there was almost no dialogue between Kamijou and Othinus in the battle scene.

I wrote this while swearing I would give the volume a happy ending, but I still gave that punishment to view the happy world in the very end. Just hearing that may sound like a light punishment, but if you re-read New Testament 9, you should find its true value and see humanity's ironic counterattack against Othinus.

It was a happy ending but it had what could be seen as the ultimate punishment, so I will end this with a line from the novel.

"Despite all that, you chose to face the world, Othinus."

I give my thanks to my illustrator, Haimura-san, and my editors, Miki-san, Onodera-san, and Anan-san. Writing nothing but exciting battles increases the amount of work and the readers will gradually get used to it, so this had to be another difficult volume for them. Thank you very much.

I also give my thanks to all of the readers. I'd been holding off on "I'll destroy that illusion" since starting New Testament, so how did you like having it released here? This was a story of hope where the small bits of good make up the majority even when the world seems harsh and filled with hostility and hatred. I hope you enjoyed it.

It is time to close the pages for now while praying that the pages of the next book will be opened.

And I lay my pen down for now.

By the way, how did you like her lovestruck side?

-Kamachi Kazuma